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ABSTRACT

This study investigated factors impinging upon the successful implementation of reform in New Jersey's special needs or Abbott districts. Surveys of 28 Abbott districts examined the extent to which districts embraced remedial measures in the Supreme Court's rulings; perceived compatibility between remedial measures embodied in the reform and prior reform initiatives; level of civic support for the reform; current status of the districts' implementation efforts and resource constraints; perceptions of support from New Jersey's Department of Education (NJDOE); and expressed confidence that factors crucial to bringing about improvement in the educational systems were being critically addressed by the reforms. Overall, districts supported the Supreme Court's remedial mandates, though there was some resistance to reallocating existing funds to support the reform. Nearly half perceived considerable compatibility between the state's implementation directives and some of their prior reform activities. Levels of civic support were uneven. Districts and schools experienced severe capacity problems during the first year of implementation because they had very little time to engage in the necessary capacity building activities. Districts perceived the NJDOE's support to be inadequate. Funds, problems with the NJDOE, and time were the three most serious impediments to implementing reform. The survey instrument is appended. (Contains 47 references.) (SM)

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A Study on Whole School Reform in New Jersey Special Needs Districts

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The Center for Urban Leadership, Renewal and Research

Seton Hall University's Department of Educational Administration and Supervision within the College of Education and Human Services recently established ***The Center* for *Urban Leadership, Renewal and Research.*** The ***Center*** was a natural outgrowth of the University's mission and commitment to serve as an educational gateway to the community. The Center's objectives are to provide ongoing research and study of urban reform efforts in order to guide future policy-making, to help districts improve the implementation process, and to publicize process. Also, to provide research-based, practitioner-validated professional development training and on-site coaching to urban districts throughout the state.

In 1999, ***The Center for Urban Leadership, Renewal and Research*** undertook a major study of issues confronted in the Abbott Districts that related to implementation and effects of the New Jersey Whole School Reform efforts. The CENTER takes pride in presenting to you ***The Quest for Equity and Excellence in Education: A Study on Whole School Reform in New Jersey Special Needs Districts.*** It is our belief that this study will help improve the quality of implementing whole school reform; it will provide districts with data that can be used to plan and fine tune the reform efforts; it will provide policy makers with solid information that can be used to guide future education initiatives for urban districts; it will assemble best practices that can be replicated elsewhere in the country and assist districts and the state in assessing whether the reform is producing expected improvements.

For additional copies of this study, please contact the Department of Educational Administration and Supervision, Center for Urban Leadership, Renewal and Research, Seton Hall University 07079 at 973-275-2735 or email to depalmma@shu.edu.

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The Quest for Equity and Excellence in Education:

A Study of Whole School Reform In New Jersey Special Needs Districts

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Executive Summary

Funding and educational excellence have remained persistent problems for New Jersey's poorest districts. Performance data on the state's assessment indicate that students in the neediest districts continue to achieve at levels significantly below their more affluent counterparts. The state Supreme Court has, since the 1970's consistently ruled that the state has contributed to the problems in these districts by failing to meet its constitutional obligation both in terms of achieving parity funding and in the provision of quality educational programs. In 1997 and 1998, the Supreme Court ending almost three decades of legal challenges to the constitutionality of the state's funding policy, ordered the Commissioner of Education to ensure parity funding for poor districts and to implement a number of remedial measures directed at redressing their longstanding problems with achievement. Far reaching in implications, these measures focus on several of the factors that have been identified as contributing to underachievement in poor communities, for example, the lack of preschool education and the social and health problems frequently associated with poverty.

In keeping with the Court's ruling, schools in the special needs or Abbott districts began in the 1998-1999 school year, to implement a process of reform aimed at transforming their educational systems. This process entailed the implementation of a number of reform activities to include the adoption of whole school reform models, decentralization of decision-making, establishment of early childhood education programs, creation of new school-based positions and the development of plans for facilities improvement and technology. The process of transformation however, has not been without difficulties and the continual tension between the intent of the Court's directives and the unfolding of the reform under the stewardship of the New Jersey Department of Education has resulted in the state's Supreme Court once again becoming involved in the issue of funding and quality educational programming in these districts. Indeed, in its most recent decision the Court ruled that the State has violated the mandate regarding quality preschool programs for three and four year olds and has subsequently redirected the State to conform to the proposals for preschool education formally laid out in the 1998 decision.

Complex reform efforts inevitably are plagued by difficulties, especially during the efforts' early stages. In 1999, the Center for Urban leadership, Renewal and Research in the Department of Educational Administration and Supervision at Seton Hall University undertook a major study of the implementation issues districts confronted during the first year into reform. The study was guided by the following six questions:

1. To what extent do the Abbott Districts philosophically embrace the remedial measures in the Court's rulings?

2. What is the perceived compatibility between the remedial measures embodied in the reform and prior reform initiatives undertaken in the Districts?

3. What is the level of civic support emanating from civic groups and institutions in the Abbott communities for the reform, and what factors impact on the districts' abilities to garner support for the reform?

4. What is the current status of the districts' implementation efforts and what resource constraints, if any, do they face?

5. What are the districts' perceptions regarding the level and quality of support received from the New Jersey Department of Education?

6. How confident are the Districts that factors crucial to bringing about improvement in their educational systems are being critically addressed by the current reform and what do they see as their most pressing needs?

These questions were approached in the study from a system's rather than school-level perspective based on the following rationale. First, although the reform speaks directly to the school as the locus of change, the assumption can be made that during the early stages of the reform a great deal of central co-ordination will be needed to help individual schools with their implementation. Second, and related to the first point one may posit that the larger operating environment in which the schools are embedded, its capacity, and its needs will be crucial to ensuring successful implementation at the school level, especially since the individual sites are likely to face several capacity issues. Finally, in extending the first two arguments one can infer that plotting the future trajectory of the reform will necessitate an understanding of not only school level factors but system-wide factors as well.

To that end, the study surveyed all twenty-eight Districts that were classified as being Abbott at the time of the study. (Since the study, two other districts have been designated as being special needs). Twenty-two of the districts responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 79%. The surveys were completed by the individuals whom the chief school administrators in the Abbott districts identified to be the most knowledgeable about their districts' implementation efforts. For the most part, these were central office staff who had the responsibility for coordinating their districts' efforts. This Executive Summary provides an overview of what can be considered to be the most salient findings emerging from the study.

Key Findings

Degree of Support for Abbott Measures

- **The Abbott Districts support the remedial mandates of the Supreme Court, however the measures associated with elementary schooling are perceived to hold greater implications for bringing about improvement than the measures for secondary and middle schools.**

Overall, Districts strongly endorsed the general measures that are related to parity funding, deferment by Commissioner to local authority in decision making, high quality professional development and instructional-based after school programs. There was also strong support among the districts for measures that directly impact on early childhood education such as preschool programs and all day kindergarten. These programs as well as class size reduction, and ninety minutes of reading instruction were considered by at least half of the Districts to be very important in improving achievement at the elementary level. However, districts did not feel that the presumptive model "Success for All" was as important as these other measures. At the secondary and middle school levels the only measure that was considered by at least half of the districts to be important to bringing about improvement was the creation of alternative middle and secondary school programs.

- **There is resistance among some districts to the concept of reallocating existing funds to support elements of the reform.**

  Districts according to the Court's decision may use existing funds to support the reform, if the use of such funds do not jeopardize existing programs. However, the study found that more than half of the districts did not endorse this funding strategy. This position has placed the districts at odds with the State Department of Education, which has stated that where anticipated revenues are insufficient, reallocation of resources should be used to fund the reform. Funding the reform thus remains an issue to be resolved. For the districts this continues to be a vexing problem and more that 70% have stated that funding has been a barrier to implementation.

- **More than forty percent of the Districts find that there is a great deal of compatibility between the State's directives regarding implementation and some of their prior reform activities in the areas of school restructuring, instructional technology, professional development and facility improvement. However in the areas of standard-based curriculum and assessment more than a third of the districts find little if any compatibility between the changes which they have made in response to the State's initiatives in these areas and the guidelines for implementing whole school reform.**

  Policy discontinuities in reform efforts that are either spearheaded or managed by State Departments of Education have been found to be potentially destabilizing factors in large-scale reforms. In the case of Abbott one such possibility exists between the districts' responses to the States expectations for teaching and learning as articulated in the core curriculum standards and the State's new assessment programs on the one hand, and the current guidelines for implementing the Abbott mandates on the other. Much of the concern about lack of articulation between the reform and the standard based elements of the state's curriculum and assessment frameworks revolves around the whole school reform models that have been approved by the NJDOE. These models and specifically those that are instructionally based are de-coupled from the New Jersey's core content standards, raising concerns among the districts that the models may not be helping their teachers and students meet the challenging demands of the core standards.

Civic Support for the Reform in the Abbott Districts

- **The level of civic involvement in previous reforms has been uneven in the Abbott districts, and is perceived as being similarly uneven for the Abbott reforms. This unevenness is reflected in not only differences in the level of civic engagement between the districts but also in the degree of engagement exhibited by various groups within the communities.**

  The concept of civic capacity has been used to understand the level of external support for change in urban districts. It has been posited that successful transformation of urban educational systems will rest partially on the ability to form broad-based educational coalitions around change efforts. The findings in the study indicate that a significant number of the Abbott districts (11) have been able to garner broad base support around the current Abbott reforms, while three districts have been able to create a moderate base of support. However, there are approximately six districts that are undertaking this major reform with minimal support from their communities. These districts we were able to establish from subsequent analysis lacked a history of prior civic engagement in reform and were among the most economically deprived districts in our sample.

- **Institutions of higher education, religious organizations, private foundations, corporations, city government and advocacy groups are perceived to be the most disengaged from the current reforms.**

  A significantly large percent of the Abbott districts indicated receiving minimal support from these groups around reform. About 87% of the districts for example reported receiving little support from foundations. Slightly less, 76% indicated that private corporations have provided minimal assistance, and 62% made similar observations with respect to the support which they have received from the religious organizations in their communities. Colleges and universities were identified by about half of the districts (52%) as providing little assistance to this reform effort. Districts are getting their strongest support from their school boards, parents, local teachers unions and community-based organizations.

- **The level of civic involvement in previous reform activities significantly influenced how willing Districts are to embrace the Abbott measures**.

  Districts which in the past have received little support from their communities around reform activities were more disinclined to support the court's measures than those for whom the opposite was true. In the study we found significant correlations between civic capacity history and support for the system-wide measures in Abbott

(.65), the elementary measures (.60) and secondary measures (.59). One may conjecture that districts based on their past experiences are well aware of what it will take to forward this ambitious reform agenda, and that districts which feel that they lack external support based on their past experiences will be more hesitant to embrace Abbott than those who have been able to create coalitions around previous change efforts.

Implementation Challenges

- **Districts during the first year of implementation had very little time to engage in the kinds of capacity building activities that a reform of this scope calls for. Consequently districts and their schools experienced severe capacity problems during the first year of implementation. The first year of implementation can thus be characterized as a period during which districts' efforts were directed at meeting the demands of the reform in a context of constricted and underdeveloped capacity.**

  Successful reform efforts make provision for school level and central office actors to engage in activities that will enhance their abilities to meet the demands and challenges of the reform. Within the context of the Abbott reform this did not occur. Districts complained that the rushed time table for complying with the state's directives and demands left them with very little time to plan effectively. In fact over 75% of the districts noted that time was the most severe resource constraint they experienced during the first year. Given the lack of time to engage in quality planning for implementation, there was no opportunity for districts to engage in the kinds of organizational review which a reform initiative as encompassing as Abbott would require. Thus, many of the districts (71%) reported experiencing great difficulties in linking and coordinating aspects of the Abbott reforms with other organizational needs.

  Problems with building internal capacity were also experienced at the school level. The training of the school management teams is most illustrative of this. For example, over two-thirds of the districts stated that the school management teams were definitely unprepared to develop their school budgets but only 47% of the districts reported that their teams were trained in the zero-based budgeting process. Neither were several of the districts able to engage their teams in training that would enable them to function as cohesive decision-making bodies.

- **The clarity and flow of information from the New Jersey Department of Education significantly contributed to the problems districts experienced during the first year of implementation.**

  The greatest difficulty districts reported confronting during the first year of implementation arose from the lack of clarity in the communications received from the NJDOE. Eighty-one percent of the districts reported that the problems they experienced with the NJDOE in this area was extremely severe. Communication difficulties with the NJDOE were significantly related to all the other areas for which districts reported problems. For instance, districts indicated that there were serious resource issues in the areas of personnel, funds, knowledge and information and that they experienced additional problems with facilities and understanding what to do. Although all of these resource issues and problem areas were found to be significantly related to each other, when we re-examined the relationships controlling for the clarity of information from the NJDOE, the strength of the relationships diminished. The inference that one can draw from this finding is that problems with the information that the districts received from the NJDOE had an adverse and ripple effect on how districts perceived other resource issues.

Perceived Role of the New Jersey Department of Education

- **Districts reported problems with the Department of Education in several other areas. These included the timeliness with which the NJDOE requested information and responded to districts' submittals, the ease of obtaining clarification from the NJDOE and the overall helpfulness of NJDOE communications in helping with their implementation efforts.**

  At least half of the districts stated that requests from the NJDOE that required submission of documents or information were usually made less than 2 weeks in advance, and many of the districts noted (95%) that it was difficult or very difficult to know what the Department was requesting. Further, when attempts for clarification were sought from NDJOE staff, sixty-eight percent of the districts indicated that they experienced great difficulty in obtaining clarification. Once submitted, the timeliness with which the state provided feedback to the districts was rated as poor by ninety percent of the districts. As a consequence, 70% of the districts felt that communications from the state department of education proved to be of no help as they begun to comply with the court's orders.

- **Districts evaluated the support provided by the NJDOE to be inadequate.**

  Districts were very negative in their ratings of the overall support provided to them by the state department of education. Seventy-six percent of the districts rated the support provided by the NJDOE as inadequate, compared to 9% who rated the NJDOE assistance to be adequate. Many districts in their open-ended comments articulated a need to have a state department that was collaborative in orientation, honest in its relationship with them and sensitive to their needs.

- **The support provided by the School Review and Improvement Teams was perceived by at least 47% of the districts to be inadequate, by 38% as somewhat adequate, and by 16% as adequate.**

  Districts who rated the SRI teams as somewhat adequate or adequate indicated that the teams had attended their school management meetings, helped in the revision of their school budgets, assisted in the choice of a whole school reform model and provided clarification of state department directives. Districts which rated the teams' support as inadequate raised a variety of concerns such as the qualification of team members, the poor attendance of some SRI team members, the SRI team members' lack of clarity about their roles and the failure of the teams to provide answers.

Areas In Which Districts Desire Assistance

- **Funds, problems with the NJDOE and time were cited as the three most serious impediments to implementing reform.**

  The three most salient factors identified by the districts as hampering their abilities to successfully comply with Abbott were funding, problems with the NJDOE and time. Invariably when districts were asked to identify what help they would need to effectively implement whole school reform, their responses fell within one of these categories. First, more collegial assistance from the department of education. Second, appropriate and sufficient funding and third, time to plan more effectively. Other responses provided by the districts include help with training for transitioning to decentralize structures, personnel at the central office to co-ordinate the reform, clear explanations, guidelines and models, and improved quality of service from the model developers.

Implications

Capacity both internally and externally remains a major issue for the districts as they seek to forward the Abbott reforms. The absence of strategic resources such as time, funds, personnel and quality information if left unresolved is likely to have a deleterious impact on the successful implementation of the Court's measures. Additionally, the inability of the districts to engage in capacity building activities both at the central office and at the school level is likely to further compromise the reform. It thus seems imperative that the NJDOE working in collaboration with the Districts must directly address how these resource issues can be solved. Strengthening the link between community and school, and tapping into the resources both materially and symbolically that exist in the communities should be pursued. The research has shown that urban systems that have been able to undergo successful transformation have been able to do so through harnessing the support from civic based educational interest groups. For the poorer Abbott districts, whose community infrastructure may not be well developed, the NJDOE should use its organizational linkage with other state agencies- for example the Office of State Planning, to see how it can assist these districts in developing effective community linkages around Abbott.

Although Abbott is primarily a school-based reform agenda, the role of the districts' central offices in ensuring the success of the reform should not be ignored. The literature on school change is replete with references on the pivotal role played by Districts' central offices in assisting schools with their implementation, and in developing mechanisms that will allow for the smooth transition from central to decentralized structures. Given these observations, questions related to the internal capacities of the districts' central offices must be addressed, and particularly in the area of personnel. The question how does Abbott get absorbed or incorporated into the organizational functioning of the districts' central offices without creating dislocations in other areas of operations for which the districts are held accountable must form part of the discussion on capacity building.

In top down external reforms where local actors have minimal latitudes in determining the parameters or elements of change, the quality of information flow from the 'external managers' of the reform is important to ensuring success. Complex school reforms involving multi-layers of actors inevitably give rise to communication problems. In these types of reform models different groups and individuals are likely to hold widely varying interpretations as to the meaning of change. Within the context of Abbott, the reform unfolded during the first year in an atmosphere of uncertainty and a pronounced gap between what was understood to be the nub of the reform as judicially approved and the regulations and directives that were issued by the NJDOE. Districts had very little faith in the utility of the NJDOE communications with most concurring that the NJDOE communications were not helpful as they proceeded in their reform efforts. Improving the quality and flow of information to districts must become a priority. The NJDOE and the Districts will have to collaboratively work towards developing communication mechanisms that will allow for the accurate, timely and two-way flow of information. To the extent that the information flow is accurate and occurs both ways, the problems associated with implementing the reform can be readily identified and dealt with. The NJDOE also has to find ways of generating guidelines for implementation that are clear and unambiguous and which do not easily lend themselves to misinterpretations.

However for this to occur, the fractious relationship between the Districts and the NJDOE has to be corrected. The NJDOE has historically tended to adopt a strong regulatory as opposed to collaborative posture towards the Abbott districts, and has been perceived by the districts as exhibiting little sensitivity to their needs. These feelings have persisted, and districts in the study considered the NJDOE to be non-supportive of their change efforts. The School Review and Improvement Team, the NJDOE structure for providing technical support to the districts was judged to be not effective by several districts. Given these findings, we recommend that the NJDOE work towards fashioning a collaborative rather than directive relationship with the districts. The complexity of the proposed reforms implies that this relationship should be one in which the state helps districts to develop their capacity, provide legitimacy to their concerns and viewpoints by engaging in mutually beneficial dialogue, and work along with the districts to solve the various problems that arise during implementation. To accomplish this, the NJDOE will have to work towards building its own internal capacity to handle its new role as managers of urban school change. We would further recommend that the NJDOE address some of the concerns which the Districts have raised about the School Review and Improvement Teams, to include the competence of some team members, their familiarity with urban educational issues and their understanding of what their roles are.

We do not feel that arguing for the NJDOE to be collaborative in its relationship with the districts is to suggest that the state minimizes its oversight role for this reform. Rather it is to suggest that the concept of school-based change through local and participatory decision making which is inherent in Abbott, looses much of its meaning if the NJDOE acts in a manner which is highly directive and overly regulatory.

Finally, the NJDOE will have to ensure that the model developers work towards fashioning a tighter articulation between their models and the NJDOE core curriculum standards and the assessments in the fourth, eighth and eleventh grades. Districts saw little compatibility between some elements of the reform and their own curricular and assessment responses to the State's Core Content Standards. Addressing this lack of articulation is important since the ultimate evidence of the success of Abbott will rest on whether students in the Abbott districts have been able to successfully demonstrate their mastery of the standards established in the state's core curriculum frameworks.

Section I

Introduction

The improvement of public education in the U.S. has been of cardinal importance for the last two decades. During this period, one has seen several waves of reform initiatives aimed at rendering American students competitive with their counterparts elsewhere around the world. Of special concern has been the improvement in the academic performance of pupils attending those public school systems in which the intersection of socio-political and economic factors has resulted in educational institutions in which achievement remains problematic. While unearthing the underlying causative factors behind these systems' failures has remained difficult, and has evoked widely varying viewpoints, the lack of economic resources and the failure of States to provide adequate funding supports have been cited in several court decisions as significant contributory factors (Pincus, 1974)[1]. These judicial decisions on the States' culpability in the continued underachievement in poor districts have resulted in various attempts at school finance reforms. Throughout the country, including the State of New Jersey one has seen a move to legislate funding policies that are more equitable in their consequences (Goertz & Doden, 1999). However, the argument has been advanced that while additional funding is a necessary precondition for reducing the achievement gap between affluent and poor districts, that funding by itself lacks sufficiency, if the additional funds are not used to support meaningful educational change. Thus, it has been suggested that for funding to result in a quality educational experience for poor students it must be linked to specific educational measures and programs whose effectiveness have been established by prior research.

In 1997 and 1998 the New Jersey State Supreme Court in two landmark decisions ordered the New Jersey State Department of Education to put in place a number of remedial measures linked to increased funding in the twenty-eight neediest districts in the state. These measures were designed to redress the educational disadvantages experienced by public school pupils in the state's special needs districts. Implicit in the rulings was the assumption that the historical disenfranchisement of pupils in property poor districts necessitated the implementation of a comprehensive reform agenda. Further, it was assumed that the successful implementation of this agenda would afford these pupils the opportunity to receive the thorough and efficient education to which they are constitutionally entitled. Both decisions represented the culmination of a series of previously rendered decisions dating back to 1973 in which the State's funding policy was found to be unconstitutional. Referred to as Abbott 1V and V, the court rulings set out an ambitious agenda for reform based on the recommendations of the Commissioner of Education. These recommendations hold significant implications for school governance, educational programming, facilities improvement and the relationship between schools and their communities to include social agencies. The cornerstone of the proposed reform especially at the elementary level is the notion of whole school change. In this model, educational improvement is envisioned as encompassing changes in all the critical facets of a school's environment in a coordinated and systematic manner.

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[1] Several reform initiatives have been introduced in these communities, such as vouchers, charter schools, and changes in governance structure and state takeovers.

Ambitious reform agendas, that is, reforms that are multidimensional in focus, tend to be negatively affected for a number of reasons by the vicissitudes of implementation. Studies on school change in particular, and systemic reform in general have consistently demonstrated that complex reforms tend to fail to produce their intended results largely as a consequence of difficulties encountered during implementation (Fullan, 1991). These difficulties arise from the tangible problems associated with capacity, support, resource adequacy, training, coordination of implementation activities, leadership and district and school level personnel buy in. However there are more subtle and intractable problems that tend to further compound the implementation process. For example, it has been shown that policy makers often underestimate or tend to eschew the impact of the multiple realities which districts and individuals confront in the implementation process. Unfortunately, the structure of these realities tend to significantly impact on how the reform gets translated into concrete practices. Also, the penchant for externally driven reform to be general and vague in directly addressing implementation issues can result in the development of what Fullan terms false clarity (Fullan, 1991). Under these conditions, district and school level staff tend to exhibit feelings of anxiety and frustration about the reform. Research has shown that each of these factors both individually and in their combination if left unaddressed, has the potential to significantly destabilize any reform effort (Schaffer, Nesselrod & Stringfield, 1997).

Within the context of New Jersey, understanding the current educational reform in the Abbott districts against the backdrop of these factors seemed highly important for a number of reasons. First, the emerging empirical data on implementation efforts at the school level reveal that schools are encountering varying problems as they begin implementing whole school reform (Erlichson et.al. 1999). Second, there is evidence to indicate that with respect to some aspects of the reform namely the early childhood component the spirit and intent of the court's ruling are being compromised. This has resulted in the court's recent decision to hear the submitted complaints that have been filed on behalf of the districts. Third, and most importantly however, identification of factors that are likely to derail the reform at this early stage of the process provides the opportunity to formatively make corrections before the reform ends up as another failed attempt to bring about meaningful change in these systems.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study investigates the factors that are likely to impinge upon the successful implementation of reform in the Abbott districts. It is particularly interested in looking at factors that broadly impact on the Abbott districts' abilities to implement and sustain the reform. In so doing, the study aims to arrive at findings that may be used to guide future policy directions as well as implementation efforts as the districts become more involved in instituting the changes mandated by the courts. The research questions were guided by the extensive body of research on factors that play a critical role in influencing successful reform efforts. With respect to the current reform, it is felt that early identification of potentially destabilizing factors and their amelioration are likely to increase the probability of its success. The following six questions are addressed by the present study:

1. To what extent do the Abbot Districts philosophically embrace the remedial measures in the Courts rulings?
2. What is the perceived compatibility between the remedial measures embodied in the reform and prior reform initiatives undertaken in the Districts?
3. What is the level of civic support emanating from civic groups and institutions in the Abbott communities for the reform, and what factors impact on the districts' abilities to garner support for the reform?
4. What is the current status of the districts' implementation efforts and what resource constraints, if any, do they face?
5. What are the districts' perceptions regarding the level and quality of support received from the New Jersey Department of Education?
6. How confident are the Abbott Districts that factors crucial to bringing about improvement in their educational systems are being critically addressed by the current reform and what do they see as their most pressing needs?

Research Methodology

The study is primarily descriptive in focus presenting pertinent information on the districts' efforts in the first year of implementing reform. In gathering data on the districts' implementation efforts a survey instrument was developed and sent to all of the Abbott districts (See Appendix A). The instrument consisted of over a hundred questions and was organized into five major sections reflecting the six research questions (research questions 1 and 2 were subsumed under Part A of the instrument). The questions drew heavily on the findings from implementation research and an attempt was made to get as comprehensive a picture as is possible through the use of survey research techniques. Given the breadth of the instrument, a decision was made to scale most of the questions using a likert type format. However, some of the scaling on the resource items was based on scaling techniques used in previous implementation studies. In addition to scaled items, several open-ended questions were included on the instrument. These items allowed districts to provide amplification to some of their responses. Prior to its formal administration, the instrument was piloted with one district primarily to identify questions whose wordings were problematic.

Two mailings of the instrument took place. A general mailing was first sent to all superintendents in the twenty-eight districts in February 1999. In the directions accompanying the questionnaire, districts were advised to have the instrument responded to by the person or persons most knowledgeable about the implementation process. We felt that such a person or persons would be in the best position to provide insights into the issues districts directly confront as they sought to implement the measures. A second mailing occurred during July 1999. The questionnaire was resent to districts that had not responded to the first mailing by the end of the school year. In all twenty-two out of the twenty-eight districts returned the survey resulting in a response rate of 79 percent.

In order to facilitate the analyses, responses provided by the districts on several questions were combined to create indices that were subsequently used in the correlational analyses. In addition to the survey data, other data sources were tapped for use in the study. These sources included 1990 census data, state level reporting figures, and published articles in the New Jersey Star Ledger.[2] Data culled from these sources were used to aide in the construction of profiles of the districts and in the correlational analyses that were conducted in the study. Information contained in the Star Ledger articles were used to augment some of the discussions that emanated from our research findings.

Profile of the Abbott Districts included in the Study

The Abbott districts are a group of 28 districts which based on socio-economic indices are considered to be the poorest in the state (See Table 1.1). For example, in 1996 roughly 74% of students enrolled in these schools systems were eligible for free or reduced lunch, as compared to 24% statewide. Unemployment figures for 1997 indicate a rate of 9.2 percent for the Abbott communities in contrast to a statewide rate of 4.5%. For the same time period, the crime rate per thousand in these communities was 74%, while for the state the rate was 40.9%. Data on the academic performance of students reveal the disparities in educational outcomes that exist between these systems and the state as a whole. In 1997, the graduation rate was 56% in the Abbott School Districts, while the State's graduation rate was 83%. Key data on the racial composition of the student population in the Abbott districts reveals the disproportionate representation of Black and Hispanic students. In 1997, the Black, Hispanic and white school population figures were 18, 14 and 62 percent respectively statewide. The comparable figures for the Abbott districts were 45, 38 and 15 percent respectively.

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[2] Some of this data was taken from a constructed profile of each Abbott District developed by the Educational Law Center.

Close scrutiny of the demographic data for individual districts reveals the variation that exists among the communities with respect to certain key indicators. For example, although we noted above that the unemployment rate in 1997 for these communities as a whole was 9.2, there were at least four communities with double-digit rates of 10.10, 10.5, 11.0 and 11.40. Similarly, there is significant range in the percent of the school budget that is funded through state aid, ranging from as low as 28% to as high as 91%. Graduation rates for individual districts also reflect differences. There were four districts that in 1997 had rates that were under 50%. However, there were four districts with graduation rates of over 80%. Although Black and Hispanic students are over-represented in the Abbott districts, the degree of racial concentration varied among the districts. For example, in 1997 six out of the twenty-eight districts were predominantly White with 50% or more of their school population being classified as White. Similarly, seven districts based on the same indicator could be classified as predominantly Black and six as Hispanic. The remaining districts had varying proportions of racial breakdowns.

Table 1.1

Key Demographic Data on Abbott Districts

Indicators	Abbott Districts	State
Percent of students eligible for free and reduced lunch based on total school enrollment-1996	73.8%	29.2%
Unemployment rate - 1997	9.2%	4.5%
Crime rate per 1,000 inhabitants-1997	74.0%	40.9%
Percent White student population-1997	14.6%	61.8%
Percent Black student population-1997	45%	18.3%
Percent Asian/Island Pacific student population-1997	2.7%	5.7%
Graduation rate-1996-1997	56%	83%

Organization of Study

This study is schematically organized into the following sections. Section I frames the study within the context of the legislative history behind the Abbott reform decisions. It also seeks to implicate the reform within the broader context of reform efforts elsewhere in the country. Section II begins the presentation of the data obtained from the districts and is devoted to a discussion on the level of support for the philosophical premises and elements of the reform. It also examines the prior reform histories of the Abbott districts and the degree to which specific reform initiatives are compatible with the present reform. Section III broadens the concept of support for the reform to include the support emanating from civic groups. It introduces the concept of civic capacity as an important variable in the implementation process and describes the level of capacity that currently exists. Issues related to internal capacity as reflected in organizational resources are taken up and discussed in Section IV. Specifically this section seeks to establish the extent to which the districts in implementation have the internal capacity to support their efforts. The quality and level of support received from the New Jersey State

Department of Education as perceived by the districts are discussed in Section VI. A brief description of the districts identification of critical factors impacting the reform and the areas in which they need help is presented in section VII. Concluding comments and recommendations are outlined in the final section to the report.

The data reported in the ensuing chapters represent the perspectives of those individuals identified by the Superintendents as most knowledgeable about the reform in their respective districts. We made the assumption that the superintendents felt that these individuals were the ones most likely to be familiar with their districts' position on the areas measured in the survey, since the survey as will be seen from the analyses presented, dealt more broadly with system rather than school level issues. Our rationale for examining system issues was twofold.

First, although the reforms focus on the local school as the site for change, there are several responsibilities that the central offices have to bear, whether or not these responsibilities are formally stated or required. For example, the central offices have to share in the co-ordination of the reform serving as communication conduits between the state and the schools and assisting the schools with implementation. They also have to engage their schools in various capacity building activities, as many schools during the early stages of the reform are likely to suffer from low capacity. The central offices also have to exhibit the kinds of behaviors that will assure the local sites that they too have bought into the reform.

The second reason for looking at system-wide factors is the need to understand the quality of district-wide capacity to handle the reform. The local schools are embedded in a larger operating environment that impacts on what they do daily. How that larger operating environment holds up under the demands of the reform is important especially in light of the previously made comments on the responsibilities of the central offices. Understanding the reform from the perspective of these broader issues provides invaluable insights into the possible trajectory of the reform, particularly if these insights are conjoin with school level data.

Section II

Historical Overview of School Reform in the Abbott or Special Needs Districts

Introduction

Decades of research has portrayed American public schools as deficient and in need of major reform and transformation (Edmonds, 1979; Fullan, 1991; Nunnery, 1998). These studies reveal a disturbing decline in academic achievement among students and a loss in the country's competitiveness with other nations in the global economy. The concerns engendered by these observations have led to the emergence of public school reform as a national priority. According to Firestone et.al. (1997), discussions on reform have pivoted around concepts of equity, efficiency and excellence. Although at times these discussions have centered on only one of these concepts, more often than not all three concepts have been combined to frame a common perspective or analysis. For example, in the early 60's and 70's reform efforts focused primarily on school finance, and its contribution to the problems of inequity and underachievement (Pincus, et.al. 1974; Wenglinsky, 1998). The underlying concern among reform proponents during this period was the over reliance on property tax as the major source for funding public education. This concern was fueled by the structural anomalies created by the inherent inequities in the property base of affluent and poor districts. Consequently, reform was approached from the perspective of creating equity between districts by introducing changes in the mechanisms in how public education was funded (Pincus 1974).

The 1980's ushered in a period in which significant shifts occurred in the language and focus of reform. These shifts were influenced by a number of seminal works which documented the failures in American public education. In 1983, A Nation At Risk published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education provided a comprehensive agenda for reforming public education. The report provided recommendations for reform in content areas, standards and expectations, teaching, leadership and fiscal support. A second report from the Department of Education, the

American Education Report (1988) re-echoed the Nation at Risk recommendations but went further in calling for public education to address the moral aspects of schooling. Similarly, a number of other reform agendas from a variety of sources offered potential solutions to the dilemmas in public education. For example, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1980) under the direction of Ernest Boyer published several studies which led to the development of a comprehensive program of reform identified as the Basic School Program. Overall, this period could be characterized as one in which the move towards standards-based education occurred It was marked by the introduction of systemic changes in curriculum, assessment, professional development and governance structure. An emphasis was placed on creating an unprecedented alignment among all the critical components of schooling which was deemed to be critical if the new standards were to be successfully met (Massell, Kirst, and Hoppe, 1997). Unlike the reform efforts of the sixties and seventies, the reform agendas of the eighties therefore, placed more emphasis on issues of efficiency and excellence as opposed to equity.

Not-with-standing these efforts, the current state of education in the United States clearly identifies the need for a continuous reexamination of public schooling for several reasons. First, changing social forces have increased the pressure on educators to alter traditional delivery systems and pedagogy. For example, the number of students living in single parent households whether through death, divorce or other factors has escalated significantly. Second, the high incidence of teenage-age pregnancy among high school aged adolescents has resulted in schools having to take on more increasingly the affective domain of students' educational development (Germinario, Cervali, and Ogden, 1992). Third, and not to be eschewed, poverty continues to have a negative effect on educational opportunities and achievement. In fact, according to Nunnery (1998), these effects are becoming more pronounced and visible as the competitive pressures of the global marketplace exacerbate the gap between the well educated and those who are struggling to master the basic skills, skills which are no longer required for the new labor force.

Within the context of New Jersey, the debate as to what pressing reforms are needed in order to ensure that all students receive a through and efficient education has been ongoing for more than twenty-five years. The legislative history has been clear that students in the poorest communities in the State have been placed at considerable educational disadvantages by the way in which public education has been historically funded, and by the failure of the State to redress these disadvantages in a manner that is judicially and educationally sound. In 1998 after a series of previous legal decisions, the State Supreme Court of New Jersey issued its most recent ruling which required the implementation of a number of remedial measures with appropriate funding in the thirty special needs districts.[3] These measures are considered to be paramount to the success of students in the states poor urban communities. The following paragraphs present the legislative history behind the current reform.

Legislative History

The New Jersey Constitution mandates that the "legislature shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of free public schools for the instruction of all children in the State between the ages of five and eighteen (N.J. Const. Art. V111). However in 1973, in Robinson vs. Cahill (62N.J.473), the State's statutory mechanism for financing public schools was found to be unconstitutional because of its almost exclusive reliance on property taxes. Historically, under this type of funding schema the disparity between affluent and poor districts was exacerbated in several ways. In response to the unconstitutionality of its funding policies, the New Jersey legislature passed in 1975 the Public School Educational Act. The act resulted in the appropriation of minimum aid to public schools on a per pupil basis.[4]

However, this new formula for funding public education did not significantly address the long- standing inequities between affluent and poor school districts. Thus, in 1981 a complaint was filed on behalf of students attending public schools in four special needs districts. These districts were Camden, East Orange, Irvington and Jersey City. The complaint pointed to the continued disparities between the wealthy and poor school districts and challenged the constitutionality of the 1975 Act. In 1988, an administrative Law judge declared the 1975 Act to be unconstitutional as applied to the special needs districts because of its contribution to program disparities between property rich and property poor school districts. According to the administrative law judge to whom the case was remanded, students attending schools in the state's poorest communities did not receive an equal educational opportunity, but rather an opportunity "determined by socio-economic and geographic location" (Supreme Court Syllabus: a-155-97). Both the Commissioner and the State Board of Education disagreed with the judge's ruling by arguing that (a) there was no relationship between property wealth and per pupil expenditures and (b) that the language of the constitution implied that students were only required to receive an education that would be sufficient for them to participate fully in the labor force.

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[3] Since the 1998 ruling, two districts have been designated as special needs.

[4] Taken from the Supreme Court Syllabus prepared by the Office of the Clerk.

The Court on direct appeal reversed the Commissioner and State Board of Education's decision and ordered that the 1975 Act be either amended or new legislation passed to ensure parity in funding. The Court also directed the Commissioner to identify special programs and services that would meet the educational needs of students in poor communities (Abbott II). In response to the Court's directives, the legislature enacted the Quality Education Act (QEA) of 1990. Under QEA it was determined that the cost of a quality public education in the State of New Jersey would be $6,640 for elementary aged pupils. In seeking to equalize expenditures between rich and poor districts, the state restricted aid to the wealthiest districts and increased aid to the poorest or special needs districts. The increase of aid to the special needs districts was accomplished through the use of a multiplier which added 5% of the amount of education aid a SND district received from the state. However, the five-percent weight was arbitrary and no study was ever done by the Commissioner or Department of Education staff on the level of funding that would be needed for the special needs districts to achieve parity.

In 1994 (Abbott III), the Court found the Quality Education Act to be unconstitutional as applied to the special needs districts. The act was deemed to be unconstitutional because of its failure to both ensure parity and to address the issue of supplemental programs which was previously required in Abbott II. In response to the Court's rulings, the legislature passed the Comprehensive Educational Improvement and Financing Act (CEIFA) in 1996. With the enactment of CEIFA, the state outlined the basis of a through and efficient education through the development of a set of substantive standards in seven core content areas. These areas were visual and performing arts, language arts literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, world languages and health and physical education. Through the use of a hypothetical model, a per pupil expenditure of $6,720 was estimated to represent what it would cost to deliver a thorough and efficient education based on the core content standards. A district could be considered to be inefficient if its per pupil expenditures exceeded the $6,720 or if it failed to meet the core standards with the T&E amount. CEIFA also contained two special provisions directly affecting educational programming in the special needs districts namely: the Demonstrably Effective Program Aide (DEPA) and the Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA).[5]

CEIFA in 1996 (Abbott IV) was judged by the courts to lack the ability to substantively add to the educational opportunities for students attending the special needs schools. The judicial rejection of CEIFA in terms of its constitutionality for the special needs districts was made on several grounds. First, the court noted that the T&E amount based on a theoretical model school district could not adequately address the disparities between affluent and poor districts in the state. Thus, it could not truly be considered to be sufficient for ensuring a thorough and efficient education in all school districts. Given this, the court rejected the T&E amount of $6,720. Second, CEIFA was rejected for its failure to conduct any empirical investigation of the actual needs of students in the special needs districts. By implication, the aid amounts attached to DEPA and ECPA were considered to be arbitrary. Third, CEIFA was rejected because of its failure to take cognizance of the critical issues related to facilities improvement.

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[5] The Demonstrably Effective Program Aid (DEPA) provided funds to school districts for instructional , school governance and health and social services. ECPA aid was used to target programs that would result in the provision of full-day kindergarten and preschool classes, as well as other early childhood services.

On the basis of its judicial rejection of CEIFA, the State Department of Education was directed by the court to assure parity in per pupil expenditures between each Special Needs Districts and the most affluent districts by the 1997-1998 school year. The Department of Education was also directed to implement administrative measures that would guarantee that all expenditures were used to maximize the educational benefits to students attending schools in the Special Needs Districts (SNDs). In addition, the Department was required to address the special educational needs of students in the SNDs through the identification and implementation of supplemental programs. The Supreme Court in remanding the matter to the Superior Court instructed the Superior Court to require the Commissioner to initiate a study and prepare a report with specific findings and recommendations on the unmet social, health and environmental needs of students in the SNDs that must be redressed in order for them to attain a through and efficient education. The report according to the Supreme Court must identify the additional needs of those students, specify the programs required to address those needs, determine the costs and establish a plan for implementing the needed programs. Additionally, the Superior Court was directed to have the Commissioner of Education address the educational capital and facility needs of the special needs districts and to identify the steps that must be taken to address these needs.

In May 1998 (Abbott V), on review of the remand report and recommendations of the Superior Court, the Supreme Court agreed upon a set of remedial measures that it considered must be implemented in order to ensure that public school children in poor urban communities receive the substantive educational entitlement guaranteed in the constitution.

Elements of the Court Ordered Remedial Measures

The current Abbott remedies as ordered by the New Jersey Supreme Court can be divided into four broad substantive categories: standards-based reform, early childhood education, social and health services and other program and facilities improvement (Refer to Table 2.1). The remedies incorporate the elements of equity, efficiency and excellence and attempt to redistribute educational funding within a prescribed formula. Within the standards-based reform context, whole school reform using designated models is required of all schools in three year phases and a governance model of site based budgeting and decision making is further required to guide the implementation of the designated reform model. All school districts are required to implement half day early childhood programs for all three and four year olds, full and extended day programs for three and four year old based on a needs assessment process and full day kindergarten. Comprehensive health, technology and facilities plans are also included as part of the court ordered measures. In total, the remedies represent one of the more far-reaching and comprehensive agenda for the reform of poor school districts in the nation.

Table 2.1

Abbott Remedies[a]

#	Remedy	Date/Implementation
	Standards-Based Reform	
1	Parity with suburbs in per-pupil funding for standards-based education	Sept. 1997, ongoing
2	Standards-based curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development	Sept. 1997, ongoing
3	Elementary whole school reform with Success for All as the presumptive model	Sept. 1998, 50 schools/Sept. 1999, 100 schools/Sept. 2000, 169 schools
4	School-based budgeting as part of whole school reform	Same as above
5	Site-based management including parents and teachers	Same as above
6	Standards-based accountability system and state evaluation of whole school reform	As soon as feasible
7	Middle & high school whole school reform based upon developments in research	Commissioner decides Sept. 1999

Table 2.1 (continued)

Early Childhood Education

8	Full-day Kindergarten	Sept. 1999
9	½ day for all 3 & 4 yr olds	Sept. 1999
10	Full/extended day for 3 & 4 yr olds based on local needs assessment	Local program plan, state funding

Social & Health Services and other Programs

11	Health/social service coordination/referral to community-based providers and needs assessment to identify unmet needs	Commissioner to provide coordinator in every middle and high school
12	On-site health/social services where services do not exist in the community or cannot be efficiently and effectively provided outside the school	Local needs assessment, local program plan, state funding
13	After school/summer and nutrition programs based upon local needs assessment	Local program plan, state funding
14	Quality alternative middle and high schools or comparable programs – a dropout prevention specialist at each regular middle and high school	Commissioner authorized to implement these programs
15	School-to-work and college-transition programs	Commissioner directed to implement at the request of schools or districts
16	Enhanced technology based upon local needs assessment	Local program plan, state funding
17	Expanded alternative and school-to-work programs based on local needs assessment	Local program plan, state funding

Facilities Improvements

18	Comprehensive state managed and funded facilities program to correct code violations, eliminate overcrowding, and provide educationally needed spaces	• Jan. 1999 - local plans • Sept. 1999 - architectural work done • May 2000 - construction begins
19	Class size of 15 in pre-K, 21 in K-3, 23 in 4-5	Included in facilities planning
20	Improve school security based on local needs assessment	Local program plan, state funding
21	Temporary facilities to meet early childhood deadlines	Sept. 1998 and 1999, state funding

•Taken from the documents published by the Education Law Center

Conclusion

The current reforms proposed for the Abbott or special needs districts reveal a strong influence of many of the reform concepts embodied in past reform efforts nationwide. There is a concerted attempt to address the key issues of equity, efficiency and excellence in the measures adopted. The scope of what is being proposed places New Jersey in the forefront of educational reform and, if successfully implemented, could begin to redress the long standing problems that have plagued schooling in these districts. The extent to which the Abbot districts philosophically endorse these measures is discussed in the following section.

Section III

Abbott Districts' Philosophical Embracement of the Abbott IV and V Measures

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Introduction

This Chapter examines the degree to which the Abbott Districts philosophically embrace the various remedial measures prescribed in the Supreme Court's decision. It is also concerned with the extent to which these measures, as they are communicated by the State to the districts in regulatory form are perceived to be compatible with prior or ongoing reforms, whether or not these reforms are indigenously or externally driven. An examination of the Districts' support of the measures is important for several reasons. First, prior research has established that the success of an externally driven reform is highly contingent upon the local site's endorsement of that effort. However, that level of support is influenced by a confluence of factors including the interpretation of the reform, local capacity, and the political environment (Massell, Kirst, & Hoppe, 1997). Second, the philosophical endorsement of policies in their ideal formulations cannot be taken ipso facto to imply support or acceptance of the directives or regulations that flow from them. It is therefore important to discern the point at which policies become undermined or destabilized by the conflicts and ambiguities generated by attempts at implementation. Third, to the extent that the externally driven reform lacks congruity with local initiatives and needs a potentially deleterious effect is set in motion which may erode the spirit and intent of the reform.

Findings from national studies on local school districts reaction to externally driven reform underscore why such lines of inquiry are important for the State. For example, Hertert, (1996) study of the response of local districts to systemic reform in nine states revealed that similar to the Abbott Districts, districts elsewhere in the country that are characterized by severe resource constraints uniformly expressed concerns about their States' reform efforts in the areas of (a) coherence and integration across state policies, and (b) compatibility with local needs. State reform initiatives in Connecticut, Kentucky, Minnesota and Georgia were criticized for lacking policy integration and coherence. For example, districts complained about redundancy in reporting requirements, the omission of issues related to teacher education and preparation, and in Kentucky there were complaints about the contradictions in the state's posture on reform and the reality of state actions. Specifically, Hertert noted that criticism was leveled at Kentucky for re-regulating rather than deregulating. Although one aspect of that state's reform agenda called for the devolution of authority and decision making at the local level, districts complained that the state's department of education continued to be directive in its relationship with them. In addition to the lack of policy integration, states' reform policies were also criticized for their disconnection from local needs and initiatives. Schaffer, Nesselrodt and Stringfield (1997) in work of similar national scope, found that a critical impediment to reform in some districts was the incompatibility between some reform models and local curriculum. In particular, their study highlighted how one reform model, the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) ran into trouble in many of the schools which attempted to implement it because of its incompatibility with the prior curricular frameworks existing in most of the CES schools.

Given these findings, it is instructive for us to understand the base of support that exists among the Abbott districts for the Abbott 1V and V decisions. The remedies embodied in both rulings touch upon a wide range of issues that are both general in nature, and specific to improvement at the elementary and secondary levels. According to the Courts, these remedies are considered to be necessary for ensuring that public school children in the poorest urban districts receive the educational entitlements guaranteed them under the constitution. To that extent, the remedies as crafted are comprehensive and far-reaching in their implications for bringing about systemic change within these systems. However, a clear distinction must be made between the measures as they were defined by the Courts and the translation of these measures handed down by the State Department to the districts in the form of operational and regulatory guidelines for implementation. There is strong evidence to indicate that the varying interpretations of the meaning and intent of the Courts' rulings have pitted the State Department of Education against several of the districts and groups legally advocating on their behalf.

(Star Ledger, October 14, 1999). For example, it has been argued that the state's directives which mandate that districts rely solely on the Department of Human Services non-educational standards for child care contradicts the Courts' preschool standards implicit in Abbott as well as the State's own position which it argued for in court (Education Law Center, 1999).[6] Further, it has also been pointed out that the whole issue of standard based education that underlie the proposed remedial measures is obscured in the State regulations on implementation.

In measuring the degree to which the Abbott Districts embraced the remedies set forth by the Supreme Court in Abbott 1V and V, districts were first asked to evaluate each for its value to their overall goal for systemic improvement and then to evaluate the specific elementary and secondary measures for their potential contribution to meaningful improvement at these levels of schooling . The goal of this analysis was to determine the level of support for the measures as they were formulated in the courts' rulings. The second set of analyses focused on establishing the reform environment of the districts prior to Abbott, and the degree to which the various directives regarding implementation from the NJDOE were perceived to be congruent with or at odds with aspects of the districts' reform agendas. The districts' responses are looked at singularly and are tabularly presented in Tables 3.1 through 3.5.

Findings

General Remedies

The proposed remedies in Abbott for system-wide improvement focus on issues related to parity funding, facilities improvement, professional development, local authority, instructional staffing and technology. Districts were asked to judge the importance of each of these general remedies for its potential contribution to their overall goal of systemic improvement. Table 3. 1 provides a rank ordering of the remedies based upon their perceived importance to systemic change. The five remedies that Districts strongly embraced as being vital to their improvement were funding parity (91%), facilities improvement (82%), deferment by Commissioner to local authorities in program and budgeting decisions (71%), high quality professional development programs (69%) and instructional-based after-school and summer programs (67%). In all instances, more than two-thirds of those responding on behalf of their districts strongly agreed that these remedies were important to their districts' established goals for transformation (Refer to Table 3.1).

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[6] Education Law Center Affidavits and Complaints Re-Submitted to the Court.

Table 3.1

Rank Ordering of Abbott Remedies Importance for District-wide Systemic Improvement

Abbott Remedies	Percent of Districts Strongly Agreeing to its importance
Funding Parity	91%
Facilities Improvement	82%
Deferment by State to Local Authorities	71%
High Quality Professional Development Programs	69%
After School and Summer Programs	67%
Ongoing Assessment of Student Needs	59%
Curriculum and Assessment Aligned with the Core Content Standards	55%
Additional Special Education Programs	55%
Reallocation of Existing Funding	43%
Special Instructional Staff-Music, Art	38%
Security	36%
Technologies	32%
Enhanced Nutritional Program	29%

Note: Number of Districts responding-22

To amplify these results, approximately ninety-one percent of the districts felt that parity in funding which would mean a per pupil cost of $8,800 was very important to bringing about improvement. However, districts did not see the measure that allowed for the reallocation of existing funds even if those funds did not undermine or weaken existing regular education or supplemental programs as being highly viable. Indeed, only 43% felt that reallocation was very important for systemic changes to occur. It is instructive to note that on this issue of reallocation there seems to be some disagreement between the State and Districts. While the districts on the one hand, would prefer a model of funding that does not entail the reallocation of existing fund to support new and expanding programs, the NJDOE on the other, sees this as the preferred strategy in instances where existing funds are inadequate. In its regulations issued June 1999, districts were advised by the NJDOE that "where funds available within the 1999-00 budget, together with anticipated revenue increases are not sufficient to support the proposed 2000-01 budget, all available resources should be reallocated for the purposes of implementing WSR, required secondary programs and as applicable particularized needs..." (New Jersey Department of Education, 1999:p 5). Some critics of the State's position on this issue have argued that the Department of Education has failed to provide directives that would safeguard against weakening existing programs and services if reallocations were to occur.[7]

Of the Court measures that touch upon instructional and curricular issues that are examined in the Table, districts felt that programs or efforts that pertained to instructionally-based after-school and summer programs, high quality professional development for staff, ongoing assessment of students' academic, health and social needs, alignment with the core curriculum content standards and special education programming had the greatest saliency for improvement. On all these measures, at least half of the respondents from the twenty-two districts felt that they were very important for systemic changes to occur. Programs, prescriptions or allowances with relatively low endorsement for their systemic impact were the hiring of special instructional staff, as needed, guidelines for technology staffing and hardware, guidelines for security guards, and enhanced nutritional programs.

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[7] Education Law Center

Elementary Remedies

The most comprehensive measures prescribed by the rulings are directed at impacting on the education of elementary aged children. Described as whole school in their implications, these measures cover the areas of early childhood education, school governance, health and social programming. The concept of whole school reform as we intimated earlier, signifies an approach to change which encompasses all the major elements of a school's environment and operations in contrast to other models of change which are singular in focus (Fashola and Slavin, 1997). Forwarded by the Commissioner as the driving force behind the transformation of elementary schools in the Abbott Districts, the court required the State Department to comport with the recommended whole school reform measures as expeditiously as possible. Examples of specific sub-components of the Whole School Reform model include the provisions of quality pre-

Table 3.2

Rank Ordering of Abbott Elementary Remedies Importance to Improvement of Elementary Schooling

Elementary Remedy	Percent of Districts Strongly Agreeing to its Importance
Full-Day Kindergarten	84%
Preschool for Three And Four Year Olds	80%
Class size reduction	78%
Ninety minutes reading instruction	57%
Alternative to Success for All	50%
Extended Preschool	47%
Family Support Teams	43%
On-Site Health Services	43%
Parent Laision	33%
School-Based Management	25%
Success For All	14%

Note: Number of districts responding-22

school programs for three and four year olds, establishment of full day kindergarten for all eligible five-year olds, adoption of a Whole School Reform model with Success for All being the presumptive model, and a governance structure which is school based. (With respect to the adoption of a whole school model, districts were given the choice to forego the presumptive model and select a model from one of four other models including, Modern Red School House, Comer, Adaptive Learning and Accelerated Learning). In addition, cognizant of the strong influence of wider social forces on the achievement of students in the Abbott districts, the recommended reforms, also proposed a social services component that would attend to the students health and social support needs.

The perceived criticality of the proposed reform components is presented in Table 3.2. The table indicates that measures that sought to redress urban children's educational deficits through the establishment of early childhood programs were perceived by districts to be the most important for improving elementary education. For example, the remedy which required the offering of full-day kindergarten program to all five-year olds beginning in the 1998-99 school year was considered by 84% of those responding to the survey on behalf of their districts to be the most important remedy in the court decision affecting elementary schooling (Refer to Table 3.2). Similarly, the requirement for pre-school experiences for all three and four year olds was highly endorsed in (80%) of the Districts. However, in-spite of this endorsement, several controversial issues have recently surfaced with respect to the implementation of quality pre-school programs in the Districts. These issues deal with the cost of funding the Districts' pre-school plans, standards on the educational requirements of those employed by community-based centers, and guidelines on uniform programming.

The total estimated cost for implementing the preschool programs outlined in the individual District plans would necessitate an additional $250 million per year expenditure. This expenditure would provide services to approximately 44,000 three and four year olds. The plans developed by the districts proposed the utilization of a combination of sources. These sources included in-district programs, Head Start and other community- based programs. In developing their plans, Districts used the standards in the pre-school model presented by the Commissioner during the Abbott V hearings as well as the New Jersey Goodstarts standards (Ponessa, 1999). However, many of the plans were initially rejected by the State Department of Education and all districts were directed by the NJDOE to make the following uniform changes. First, to reduce their enrollment projections by 25%. Second, to use as a guideline for quality pre-school programming the Department of Human Services standards, not those developed by the State Department of Education. Third, to remove components of the plans that address social and health related issues. Fourth, to remove Head-Start as a provider, and fifth, to exclude from their plans transportation (Ponessa, 1999). Finally, districts were directed to use their ECPA (Early Childhood Program Aide) allocations which included an additional $37 million to fund the cost of their early childhood programs as well as some of the cost incurred by community-based providers.[8] According to an article published by the New Jersey Star Ledger, at the start of the 1999-2000 school year only about half of the three and four year olds had enrolled for preschool classes and most were in centers based on state records with "histories of understaffing, improper disciplining of children, insufficient teaching materials and construction problems" (New Jersey Star Ledger, September 22, 1999:pp 23).

The other proposed elementary remedies that were deemed by the districts to be critical for improvement were class size reduction, ninety minutes of reading instruction and the flexibility to choose an alternative whole school reform model to the presumptive model of Success for All. Indeed, only 14% of the Districts felt that the adoption of Success for All was highly important in creating improvement in their elementary schools. Other measures in the rulings considered to be less important to elementary education improvement were family support teams, on-site health services, creation of parent laision positions and school-based management (See Table 3.2). One may infer given the patterns in the responses that the urban districts in their endorsement of the Abbott measures are more inclined to favor measures that impact directly on instruction and learning, than those which lack a direct bearing on these two areas. However, from the responses it is obvious that districts would prefer not to be locked into a set instructional model such as Success for All. The State in the new regulations issued for implementing Abbott for the 1999-2000 school year has been responsive to the Districts' desire for flexibility and have allowed districts as part of their Whole School Reform efforts to choose instructional models that may be 'home-grown'.

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[8] The Early Childhood Program Aid was part of the special provisions of the Comprehensive Educational and Financing Act of 1996.

Secondary Remedies

The State Department of Education recommendations for secondary and middle schools to the court during the hearings for Abbott V focused on the implementation of supplemental programs involving the areas of technology, school to work and college-transition programs, and alternative secondary and middle school models. These recommendations were proffered to counter the deleterious impact of leaving untouched issues related to secondary and middle schooling. In the absence of any compelling empirically grounded body of research on effective whole school reform secondary school models, the implementation of supplemental programs was viewed as one way of ensuring that these pupils educational success would not be further hindered.

Table 3.3

Rank-Ordering of Abbott Secondary Remedies Importance For Secondary Schooling Improvement

Secondary Remedy	Percent of Districts Agreeing to its Importance
Alternative middle and secondary programs	62%
Class size reduction to 23 in grades 5-8, and 24 in high schools	48%
On-site health and social services, if needed	38%
Drop-out prevention coordinators	30%
School to work and college transition programs	25%

Respondents from the twenty-two Abbott Districts provided feedback on the importance of these remedies for improving secondary schooling. As can be seen in Table 3.3, overall, the measures for secondary schooling were considered to be much weaker in their potential to significantly impact on change when compared to the elementary measures.[9] Of the remedies proposed, only alternative school programs were viewed by more than half of the districts as very important to the creation of improvement in secondary and middle schooling. Class size reduction was considered to be important by 48%, followed by on-site health (38%), dropout prevention coordinators (30%), and school- to work and college transition programs (25%).

Prior Reform Efforts in the Abbott Districts

As noted in our introductory comments to the Chapter, it is important to understand from the Districts' perspective, the degree of compatibility which exists between Abbott's remedial measures, particularly these measures in their regulatory form, and any prior reform activities occurring in the Districts. The assumption can be made that measures that are compatible with ongoing reform initiatives stand a better chance of being successfully implemented than those that are at odds. Table 3.4 presents some of the pertinent findings in this area. First, the Table reveals that many of the districts have been engaged in a plethora of reform activities. Some are in response to broader state reform initiatives such as standard based curricular and assessment reforms as well as other state initiatives derived from Abbott's previous rulings such as the ECPA (Early Childhood Program Aide), while others presumably are based on local initiative. Second, the data indicates some districts had begun to address areas dealt with in Abbott V such as at-risk programming, technology, parent and community relationship, school based management, school restructuring among others.. Irrespective of the nature of the driving force been behind these initiatives, the data indicates that many of the Abbott districts were engaged in change efforts prior to the Abbott V decision.

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[9] Most of the remedies had less than two-thirds of the districts agreeing to their importance. Several were less than 50%.

Table 3.4

Types of Reforms Implemented in Districts Prior to Abbott IV and V

Reform Area	Percent of Districts Engaging in Reform Activity
At-risk programs	96%
Technology	96%
Professional Development	91%
Early Childhood	82%
Parental Involvement	82%
Community Relations	73%
School-based management	73%
Standards-based curriculum	68%
Facilities improvement	64%
Standard-based assessments	64%
School restructuring	59%

The degree to which the State was able to capitalize on districts' ongoing reform activities is evident in Table 3.5. The information contained in the Table starkly reveals the disjuncture between the directives for implementing the reform agenda associated with Abbott and the standard based initiatives in curriculum and assessment. Almost a third of the districts that were engaged in standard-based changes indicated that there was very little compatibility between their reform efforts in this area and the states' directives for implementing whole school reform. On the other hand, districts perceived that there was congruity between the state regulations and their reform efforts in the areas of early childhood education, parent and community relationship, and at-risk programs. However, consistency between the State and districts was perceived to be greatest in the areas of school restructuring (54%), technology (52%), professional development (42%), and facilities improvement (40%).

Table 3.5

Degree of Compatibility Between Guidelines for Implementation and Districts' Prior Reform Activities

Prior Reform Area	Degree of Compatibility			
	none	very little	some	a great deal
At-risk Programs	-	15%	50%	35%
Technology	5%	10%	33%	52%
Professional Development	5%	5%	47%	42%
Early Childhood	-	22%	44%	33%
Parental Involvement	-	29%	35%	35%
Community Relationship	-	25%	38%	38%
School-Based Management	6%	-	59%	35%
Standard-based Curriculum	-	31%	44%	25%
Facilities Improvement	7%	13%	40%	40%
Standards Based Assessment	-	31%	44%	25%
School Restructuring	8%	-	39%	54%

Note: These percentages are based only on districts that had indicated they had engaged in prior reform activities in these areas.

Conclusion

Sustainable reform efforts involve the commitment and cooperation of all key stakeholders. The data in this Chapter indicates that there is a high level of support from the Abbott districts for the remedial measures that were prescribed by the Courts in the Abbott IV and V rulings. Some of these measures were viewed by the Districts as holding greater implication for change than others. Specifically, there is a high level of support for the measures that bear upon parity funding, early childhood and preschool education, curricular and instructional programming, with the exception of having a presumptive model, class size reduction and facilities improvement. In the areas of school restructuring and technology slightly more than a half of the responding districts noted that there was a great deal of compatibility between the state's guidelines for implementing Abbott and their previous reform efforts in these areas. However, there are some findings which suggest the existence of potentially destabilizing factors. For one, the NJDOE and districts differ on the feasibility of reallocating existing district and school funds to support the reform. Further, in the area of early childhood education, sharp differences have surfaced on staff standards, what constitutes quality preschool education programs and what level of funding is needed to support such programs. More importantly, there seems to be some policy discontinuities between the standard based reform agenda embodied in CEIFA (Comprehensive Educational Improvement and Financial Act) and the directives for implementing reform which have emanated from the State. And finally, there seems to be a level of tension between the rights of the districts to develop quality programs based on the needs of their student populations and the role of the state department as a facilitator of the reform process.

Section IV

Building Civic Support for Reform in the Abbott Districts

Introduction

Policy studies on the transformation of poor urban communities have included as one critical variable the nature and magnitude of civic support or civic capacity. These studies have found that urban transformation requires the commitment and engagement of its diverse constituencies and that successful change involves collaborative efforts among these diverse groups around a common change effort (Jones & Bachelor, 1993; Putnam, 1993, Stone, 1989a). This variable has been found to be particularly useful in models that have been applied to the study of the economic rejuvenation of urban communities, and has demonstrated significant explanatory power in understanding the transformation of such cities as Atlanta (Stone 1989b), Boston, and San Francisco (Mollenkopf, 1983). Also, it has been suggested that successful implementation of educational reform policies will rest on the development of a broad base of civic support. Such broad base support is viewed as critical to reform efforts as the limited resources in urban school systems makes it virtually impossible for them acting alone to successfully carry out major complex reforms (Orr, 1996). The ability of the Abbott Districts to generate support around the current reform is thus pivotal for ensuring the sustainability of the reform.

Civic capacity refers to the ability of local leaders to build and maintain effective alliances among representatives from governmental, business, non-profit and community-based sectors to work toward a collective problem-solving goal (Civic Capacity and Urban Education Project, 1993: 5). The relevance of this concept to the educational changes that are being enacted in the Abbott Districts is best understood by the 'double-helix' conceptualization of school reform. Hill, Wise and Shapiro (1989) posited that school change involves two strands of activities. An internal strand that focuses on the changes and innovations that are occurring within the school, and the internal capacity of the system to support and maintain its change efforts. The second strand pertains to those institutions and groups existing on the periphery of the system, whose support both symbolically as well as in the form of resource assistance is necessary for the reform to be successful.

Several studies have investigated districts' capacity to support comprehensive reforms. These studies have focused primarily on the internal capacity of these systems, and have concluded that many districts lack the internal capability without assistance to successfully implement the demanding elements of comprehensive reform models (Massell, Kirst & Hoppe, 1997). Within the context of the present study, an attempt was made to measure the level of civic support which the Abbott Districts have been able to harness for previous reform efforts as well as the current ones. The assumption was made that the ability of districts to garner support for Abbott would be influenced by the base of support that existed in prior reform efforts. In addition, we further assumed that a district's ability to create a sound knowledge base on Abbott in its community would qualitatively impact on the level of support it was likely to receive. We hypothesized that these relationships would be affected by the severity of underlying structural problems and particularly the level of poverty in the community.

Findings

Quality of Civic Support for Prior Reform in the Abbott Districts

The quality of support which the Abbott Districts received in prior reform efforts is presented in Table 4.1. The information contained in the Table indicates that support for prior reform has been more forthcoming from the Districts' school boards, teachers unions and parents than from any other group. School boards were noted as being strong supporters of previous reform efforts in the Abbott districts, with 45% or 10 out of the twenty-two districts rating the support received as excellent and seven rating the support as good. However, about one fifth or five districts rated the support of their boards as fair to poor. Local teachers unions provided strong support to reform efforts in at least 12 districts. Eight out of the 12 districts indicated that this support was excellent, while 4 rated the support provided by the unions as being good. On the other hand, 8 districts rated the cooperation from the unions as being either fair or poor.

Much has been written about the low level of citizenry concern about, and engagement in public education in the urban districts. However, as is evident from the Table, parental support for reform is perceived as being high in most of the Abbott districts. Almost 80% of the districts rated the quality of support received from this constituent group around previous reforms as being either good or excellent. Support from local city politicians, religious and community-based organizations was perceived to be decidedly much weaker than parental support but stronger than that received from other civic groups . For example, in slightly over a half of the Abbott districts (52.3%), local politicians support for educational reform was perceived to be either fair or poor. Seven districts indicated that

Table 4.1

Quality of Support Received from Key Civic Groups Around Prior Reforms

Civic Groups	Quality of Support for Prior Reform			
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
School Boards	45.5	31.8	13.6	9.1
Teachers Unions	40.0	20.0	25.0	15.0
Citizenry-parents	33.3	47.6	14.3	4.8
City Government	23.8	23.8	19.0	33.3
Community-Based Organizations	19.0	33.3	28.6	19.0
Private Corporations	9.5	28.6	28.6	33.3
Foundations	--	28.6	23.6	47.6
Religious Institutions	9.5	38.1	23.8	28.6
Institutions of Higher Education	9.0	28.6	38.1	14.3
Advocacy Groups	20.0	20.0	45.0	14.3

Note: Number of districts responding-22

local politicians provided very little assistance to their reform efforts, while 4 districts rated the support received as fair. However, ten districts reported receiving the strong backing of their local politicians in their previous attempts to improve schooling. Community based organizations were noted as lending quality support in about half of the districts (52.3%) and religious groups in about 48% of the districts.

Private corporations and foundations, on the other hand, based on the data furnished in the Table, were perceived as being the most disengaged groups in the urban districts. Only a handful of districts reported receiving quality support from these groups as they embarked on previous reforms. Institutions of higher education and advocacy groups were also viewed by the districts as being weak in their support of previous change efforts. Indeed, about 60% of the districts perceived the support which universities have provided to be fair or poor. A comparable number of districts (59%) expressed similar sentiments in their ratings of the support received from advocacy organizations.

The level of overall support received from these various civic groups was found to be quite uneven. Based on the data, it was evident that some Abbott Districts have been able to establish a firm base of civic support around previous reform efforts. However, there were a number of districts for whom civic support for reform has been weak and fragmented. These districts have been unable to garner the same degree of support from their boards or external groups to support their change efforts as the former group.

Knowledge about and Support For Abbott Reform

The knowledge base of the major civic groupings around the Abbott reform process as it is unfolding in the districts is perceived to be quite uneven. As one would expect, the local school boards and teachers unions were thought to be the most knowledgeable about the districts' implementation efforts, followed by advocacy groups. About 43% and 57% of the districts felt that their school boards and teachers unions were very knowledgeable about Abbott. In contrast, local politicians, private corporations, foundations and religious institutions were thought to have the least amount of knowledge on Abbott, with

Table 4.2

Level of Civic Group Knowledge About Abbott Reform

	Level of knowledge		
Civic Groups	**A Lot**	**Some**	**Very Little**
School Boards	42.9	47.6	9.5
Teachers Unions	57.1	33.3	9.5
Citizenry-Parents	4.8	66.7	28.6
City Government	14.3	23.8	61.9
Community-based Organizations	9.5	52.4	38.1
Private Corporations	--	14.3	86.7
Foundations	--	14.3	86.7
Religious Institutions	--	38.1	61.9
Institutions of Higher education	14.3	42.9	42.9
Advocacy Groups	19.0	61.9	19.0

Note: Number responding-22

corporations and foundations perceived as being the least informed. Although slightly more than half of the districts in the study indicated that institutions of higher education had some knowledge about their Abbott Reform activities, a significant percent (43%) noted that these institutions had very little or no knowledge at all about their activities.

Given the unevenness in the level of awareness about Abbott in these communities one may hypothesize that the level of support around the reform is likely to reflect this pattern. Table 4.3 supports our hypotheses. Districts are getting their strongest support for Abbott from their local boards (62%). Only one district indicated that it received minimal support in its attempts to implement the Abbott remedies. Interestingly, the local teachers unions

Table 4.3

Level of Support Received For Abbott Reforms and Implementation from Key Civic Groups

	Level of Support		
Civic Groups	A Great Deal	Some Support	Very Little Support
School Boards	61.9	33.3	4.8
Teachers Unions	38.1	42.9	19.0
Citizenry-Parents	23.8	57.1	19.0
City Governments	4.8	47.6	47.6
Community Base Organizations	4.8	57.1	38.1
Private Corporations		23.8	76.2
Foundations		14.3	85.7
Religious Institutions		38.1	61.9
Institutions of Higher Education	14.3	33.3	52.4
Advocacy Groups	9.5	42.9	47.6

Note: Number of Districts responding-22

while seen as being very supportive of Abbott in some districts (about one third), were viewed as being only somewhat supportive in 43% of the districts, and of no support in 4 districts. Private corporations, foundations, and institutions of higher education continue to exist on the fringes of the reform. As can be seen from the data in Table 4.3, 86% of the districts indicated that they had received no support from foundations. An equally large percent, 76% made the same observation for private corporations. In the case of institutions of higher education, the percentage of districts reporting minimal support around Abbott was 52%. One interesting finding in the Table is the relatively higher percentage of districts who reported very little support for Abbott from religious institutions as compared to the support received from this group in previous reform activities.

While our previous analysis allowed us to establish the relative role being played by these civic groups, it is equally important to determine the overall level of civic capacity that exists in any Abbott district. Thus, the question may be raised as to how broad based is the support for Abbott. In addressing this question, we developed three levels of support. Broad-based support is said to exist if districts reported receiving some or a great deal of support from at least six civic groups. Minimal support exists if districts are being supported in their reform efforts by less than five of these groups. A moderate base of support exists if districts have the backing of five groups. Based on this typology we have 11 districts in the Abbott communities with a fairly solid base of support. In these districts at least six of the major civic style groups who we would expect to have a stake in reform efforts have been supportive of the districts. There are approximately three districts with a moderate base, and six districts who virtually are undertaking this major reform effort with little or no support from their communities. Indeed, among this latter group, one district reported receiving support from only one group.

Table 4.4

Correlates of Civic Support for Abbott

	Level of Civic Support for Abbott	Knowledge Base of Civic Groups	History of Civic Support	Prior Reform History	State Aid
Level of Civic Support for Abbott		.63**	.60**	-.10	-.25
Knowledge Base of Civic Groups			.56*	-.06	-.50*
History of Civic Support				.20	-.33
State Aid					-.27

** Significant at p< .01; *p<.02

What factors impact on a district's ability to generate support for its reform efforts? Although the data does not allow us to explore this question fully, we attempted to look at the relationship between civic support for Abbott and the historical base of support that has existed in the communities prior to Abbott. Other concerns were the knowledge base of community groups, the extent of prior reform activities, and a measure of resource scarcity as reflected in reliance on state aid. These inter-relationships are summarized in Table 4.4 in the form of correlation coefficients. An examination of the coefficients reveal that support for Abbott is significantly related to knowledge base and a prior history of strong civic involvement. Districts with higher levels of civic support for Abbott were more likely to have informed constituents and were also more likely to have a tradition of civic support for reform than those with lower levels. The ability to create an informed community in turn was significantly related to prior civic history as well as dependence on state aid. The more economically deprived the district was, the more trouble it had in building a sound knowledge base in its community (-.50). Indeed, the poorer Abbott districts were apt to engage in fewer reform activities prior to the Abbott rulings, and to have a weaker history of community support and a lower level of support for the current reforms. In contrast, districts that had experiences in forging relationships around previous reforms were more likely to indicate that groups in their communities were knowledgeable about Abbott. These districts one may surmise already had established linkages which could be redirected to support Abbott.

Impact of Civic Support on Districts' Embracement of Abbott Remedies

The centrality of capacity as a variable, which influences successful implementation and subsequent sustainability of reforms has been repeatedly addressed in all the major studies of complex reform efforts. In these studies, it has been pointed out that capacity encompasses not only the factors that may be internal to the institutions undergoing transformation, but also those factors or variables that are relevant to the nexuses of relationships in the environment in which the transforming institution finds itself. The preceding analysis attempted to clarify the level of support emanating from the wider community for Abbott. Through this analysis it was established that there are distinct differences among the districts with respect to this factor. The question may thus be raised as to whether or not the districts' willingness to embrace the remedial measures in Abbott is influenced by the level of civic engagement in reform. Table 4.5 provides an explication of these relations.

As can be seen from the data in the Table, the single most important factor that influences how willing districts are to support Abbott is the history of civic support for prior reforms. Embracement of the system-wide, elementary and secondary remedies were all significantly impacted by the level of civic support for prior reforms. The correlation coefficients are .654, .604 and .590 respectively. In other words, Districts that have had a history of community involvement and support around previous reform efforts tended to embrace the Abbott remedies more readily than districts without this history. Ironically, this played a more significant role in influencing districts' support for Abbott than current support. One may conjecture that Districts, based on their previous reform efforts are well aware of what is needed to forward this complex and ambitious reform. Districts which have had to struggle through previous reform initiatives on their own are therefore, more tentative in their support of the remedies than those who enjoy support for reforms from their communities.

Table 4.5

Correlation Between Support for Abbott Remedies and Selected Factors

	Support for System-wide Remedies	Support for Elementary Remedies	Support for Secondary Remedies
Civic Capacity -Abbott	.31	.32	.29
Civic Capacity History	.65*	.60*	.59*
Prior Reform Activities	.32	.22	-.11
Poverty Level	.26	.61*	-.18

***Significant at p< .01**

The economic conditions of the school systems influenced only the level of support for the elementary remedies. The direction of the relationship implied that the poorer school districts were inclined to be more supportive of the elementary remedies than those that were relatively better off. It is quite plausible to suggest that the need for pre-school and other early childhood programs is more dire in the poorest of the Abbott Districts.

Conclusion

Studies on educational change in such cities as Pittsburgh, Boston and St. Louis (Jones, Portz & Stein, 1997), Baltimore (Orr, 1996), Detroit (Hula, Jelier & Schauer, 1997), Chicago and New York (Gittell, 1994), have all demonstrated that the ability or inability to form a broad based coalition of civic-style education interest groups is significantly related to the degree of educational success enjoyed. Within the context of Abbott, the data is unequivocally clear that the neediest of these districts are experiencing great difficulties in activating civic capacity in support of the current reform. These districts appear to lack the necessary organizational resources that can be marshaled on behalf of building institutional linkages for forwarding Abbott. Simply reconstituting the governance structure of a school to allow for the voices of the community in influencing school decisions is not enough. For the Abbott districts, the connection between school and community in the reform process must entail the solicitation of support both symbolically and in the form of resource assistance from key groups in the community.

Our data indicates that several of these groups are perceived as having a marginal status with respect to educational change. The business community, foundations, local governments, religious institutions and institutions of higher education in particular have, based on the findings reported a tangential relationship with the Abbott districts. While some districts report being the recipients of broad-based support, there are several for whom this simply does not exist. Assisting the latter group of districts in building local capacity and coalitions around Abbott is thus an imperative. However building institutional linkages in support of Abbott in these districts may be challenging given their smaller economic base, lack of organizational resources, and a structure of public and private sectors which may not lend itself easily to coalition building around education change.

Section V

Implementation, Diffusion and Innovation

Introduction

As we have seen in the preceding section, the external capacity of some of the Abbott districts to forward the reform can be questioned. One may ask the question to what extent is the lack of external capacity matched by a corresponding absence in internal capabilities. This section of the report discusses issues that relate to the internal capabilities of the districts. It begins the discussion with a general overview of some of the literature on implementation and diffusion.

Most responses to the call for educational reform have primarily focused on students mastering more complex knowledge, using standards to identify educational outcomes, and holding teachers more accountable for the academic achievement of their students (Banks and Banks, 1997). Increasingly, these efforts have been characterized by a period of intensive state involvement in reform efforts, and have been marked by research which has stressed sensitivity to local variability within the context of state oversight (Rossman & Wilson, 1996). Such variability, has sparked an interest in the implementation process as a major focus of reform research. Within this context, schools are viewed as dynamic systems where the issues of implementation are played out and where there is the increasing realization that the classroom setting has been almost impervious to external reform (Morris, 1996). This search for new solutions to recurring and long-standing problems has been coupled with a new interest in diffusion issues (Martinez-Brawley, 1995). Specifically, some researchers have added an interesting dimension to the issue of innovation by maintaining that it is the perception of innovation which is relevant rather than the actual newness of the idea or program (Slappendel, 1996). To facilitate our understanding of the districts' responses we though it important to place these responses within the context of implementation, diffusion and innovation theory.

The literature dealing with innovation, diffusion and implementation often consider these three elements interchangeably, although the issues associated with innovation are concerned with the elements of creativity and newness. Implementation and diffusion research often consider the innovation as an integrated element of a comprehensive process (Ford, 1996). For purposes of the study, respondents were asked to indicate the relative innovation inherent in the Abbott initiatives, to comment on the relation of five capacity variables to the successful implementation of Abbott related programs, to identify implementation problems, to identify implementation facilitators and to respond in an open ended fashion to impediments to goal achievement. Although a full discussion of the survey is provided, it is interesting to note that implementation issues dominated respondents concerns. This is consistent with much of the research findings and reflects the uncertainty and difficulty that occur when new or different programs are in their beginning stages (Rogers, 1995). In an attempt to provide clarity and to assist in the interpretation of the findings, several operational definitions are necessary. Innovation is defined as the introduction to an applied situation of means and ends that are new to that situation, as perceived by the implementers (Gittell and Hollander, 1968, Zaltman, Duncan and Holbeck, 1973, Rogers, [illegible]995). Diffusion is defined as the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of the organization (Rogers, 1995). Implementation is viewed as the successful development of the innovation in the organization as determined by the perceptions of the participants (Van de Ven, Angle, and Poole, ed., 1989).

In reviewing the Abbott initiatives, the Minnesota Studies identified several observations which appeared to be related to the present study. These studies found that innovation is stimulated by shocks, both internal and external to the organization, which both the Supreme Court decision and legislative fiat have precipitated in the Abbott context (Zaltman, Duncan and Holebeck, 1993). They also observed that an initial idea tends to subdivide into several ideas and that the innovation becomes modified and influenced by the system it attempts to influence. Finally, they pointed out that restructuring usually accompanies the innovation.

Research has also identified a decision making process which may be characterized as the innovation decision process (Rogers, 1995). This process which may lead to either adoption, rejection or discontinuation is one through which individuals and groups pass from a knowledge base, to attitude development, to ultimately the decision making stage (Rogers, 1995). From this process, four types of innovative decisions have been advanced to serve as a typology. These are optional innovation decisions which represent individual decisions made independent of the decisions of other members of the organization; collective innovation decisions, which are decisions made by consensus among members of a group; authority innovation decisions, which are decisions made by the power centers of a system or organization; and contingent innovation decisions, which are decisions made only after a prior innovation decision (Rogers, 1995). These useful typologies and definitions will be applied to the analysis of implementation responses in our questionnaire.

Findings

Model Adoption

Several sections of the survey dealt with implementation issues in the Abbott Districts (See Appendix). In order to facilitate the discussion, we have grouped related sections for analytical purposes. Our first set of findings focuses on the reform models chosen by schools. We asked districts to identify the models chosen by their respective cohort 2 schools, to characterize the training related to these models and to identify the decision making process undergirding the choice of a model. Of the twenty-two districts included in the study, seventeen responded affirmatively that they had one or more schools in the second cohort. According to the data provided by the districts, of the five models, the most prevalent whole school model selected by schools was Success for All. This was followed by Adaptive Learning, Accelerated Learning and Comer, and Modern Red School House.

With regards to the selection process, the data indicates some variation in the methods used by the districts. For example, about half of the districts reported that model selection was the fruition of input from teachers, principals and central office personnel thereby implying a more pluralistic process. However, roughly 37% of the districts reported that model adoption was attained solely on the basis of teacher vote with high level of teacher participation, which conforms to the guidelines promulgated by the NJDOE for model selection. In about 36% of the districts at least one or more of the models were already operating in their schools prior to the Abbott requirements mandating a selection of a whole school reform model. To a certain extent, one may say that in the latter districts the concept of innovation as the perception of the introduction of newness may not seem to hold.

Districts were asked to rate the adequacy of the training provided by the developers of each of the five models. Their responses are captured in Table 5.1. However, before we present the results a number of caveats have to be raised. First, this question elicited a high non-response rate. Although provisions were made in the response categories for districts to indicate if they had not undergone training in a given model we are not sure if a non-response simply meant that no training had occurred or that districts had simply overlooked the question. Second, when we factor out the number of non-responses, and the number of districts that had legitimately stated that their schools

Table 5.1

Perceived Adequacy of Training Provided by Model Developers

	Adequacy of Training					
Model	Very Adequate	Adequate	Somewhat Adequate	Inadequate	Very Inadequate	Did Not Receive Training
Success for All	--	5.9%	17.6%	35.3%	17.6%	23.5%
Modern Red School House	--	16.7%	8.3%	16.7%	--	58.4%
Comer	--	7.7%	15.4%	23.1%	15.4%	38.5%
Accelerated Learning	--	--	15.4%	30.8%	--	53.9%
Adaptive Learning	--	18.2%	18.2%	9.1%	--	54.6%

Number of districts rating adequacy of models- SFA (13); Modern Red School House (5); Comer (8); Accelerated Learning (6); Adaptive Learning/Community for Learning (5).

were yet to be trained in a given model, the number of districts actually rating the models was relatively small, with the largest number being 13 for Success for All. Given the fact that training was not complete at the time of this study the results in Table 5.1 should be treated as preliminary and relevant only for those schools responding. Further, given the unevenness in the number of schools that each developer had trained up to the time of this study, we do not feel that comparisons among models are justified.

Turning to the data in the Table, one sees that districts tended to be dissatisfied with the training provided by the model developers. For Success for All, approximately 6% of the districts felt that the training was adequate compared to more than 50% who felt that it was inadequate. Seventeen percent of the districts felt that the training provided by the Modern Red School House developers was adequate, 8% somewhat adequate and 17% inadequate. However, at the time of the study, more than half of the districts responding had not yet received training in this model as was the case with Accelerated Learning and Adaptive/Community for Learning. The training associated with the Comer model was judged to be adequate by about 8% of the districts, somewhat adequate by 15% and inadequate by about 38%. With respect to Accelerated Learning, none of the districts felt that the training was adequate, with 15% noting that it was somewhat adequate and 31% inadequate. The training provided by the developers of Adaptive Learning was rated as being adequate by 18% of the districts, somewhat adequate by another 8% and inadequate by 9%. Although the information gleaned on training must be approached with caution, the trend one is seeing in the data suggests that districts were not satisfied with the training provided by the model developers.

Compliance with Requirements

The status of the school related positions required by the Abbott rulings is presented in Table 5.2a. At the time of this study, most districts had begun to comply with filling these positions. For example, the positions associated with the social worker, instructional facilitator, school nurse, counselor and technology coordinator were established in most schools in more than half of the districts. Positions that were not firmly established at the time of the study were parent laision, community facilitator and drop-out prevention coordinator. In fact in the case of the community facilitator position, only 12% of the districts responded that this position had been established in most of their schools, while a significant percent (41%) stated that the position not only did not exist but they were not , at the time of the study, in the process of creating it. It is possible that there may be some uncertainty about the role and function of this conceptually new position in the traditional school bureaucracy, which may explain its low compliance status.

Table 5.2A

Status of School Related Positions Associated with Abbott at End of First Year

Position	Does Not Currently Exists	In The Process Of Establishing	Exists In Some Schools	Exists In Most Schools	Other
Instructional Facilitator	--	9.1%	36.4%	54.5%	--
Social Worker	--	--	16.7%	77.8%	5.6%
School Nurse	--	--	5.6%	94.4%	--
Counselor	--	--	--	100%	--
Parent Laision	16.7%	22.2%	16.7%	44.4%	--
Technology Coordinator	--	11.8%	17.6%	70.6%	--
Drop-out Prevention Coordinator	--	12.5%	43.8%	43.8%	--
Community Facilitator	41.2%	17.6%	29.4%	11.8%	--

In the area of needs assessment (refer to Table 5.2b), most districts had complied with the requirements. Ninety percent of the districts had completed their early childhood needs assessment and all districts their facilities assessment by the end of the first year. However, only 45% of the districts had conducted an assessment of their students' health and social needs. Although not reported in any of the Tables in response to the question regarding special education most districts noted that their special education programs were not changed significantly in terms of expected implementation requirements.

Table 5.2B
Status of Needs Assessment at End of First Year

Needs Assessment Area	Was Conducted	Was Not Conducted
Early Childhood	90%	10%
Facilities	100%	–
Social/Health	45%	55%

Number of districts responding: 22

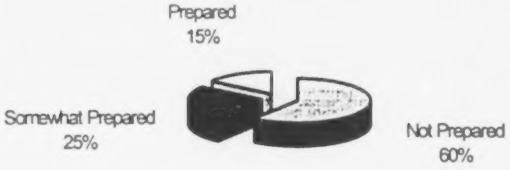
School Management Teams

Changes in the governance structures of local schools have been an integral component of the reform initiatives in many states. The predominant shifts that have occurred have resulted in the opening up of school-based decision making to a broad constituent of school and community groups. The Abbott reforms make provisions for the establishment of school management teams comprised of school based as well as community based members. The school management teams are envisioned as playing an important role in the reform process in the Abbott Districts. According to Department of Education regulations, their responsibilities entail developing a school budget, approving a whole school reform model, conducting needs assessment, engaging in program evaluations, designing school level accountability systems as well as making recommendations for programs in the areas of technology and professional development. (Such a process ideally should facilitate what Rogers' term the concept of collective innovation decision-making). Given these broad functions, the success of the teams in carrying out these tasks will be highly contingent on their level of competence and the quality of training to which they are exposed. In the study, we sought to obtain a measure of the teams in these two areas: their level of competence to make decisions and the kinds of training that they have been provided with. It should be stated, however, that given the timing of the study one would expect fairly low to moderate levels of competence in certain areas. Therefore, we view these findings from a baseline perspective, providing benchmark data against which the growing competence of the teams may be measured.

One of the first decisions which the School Management teams were expected to make concerned the development of the school budget. Schools in cohort 1 were required to engage in the zero-based budgeting process and to devise a school budget that had to be submitted to the Department of Education for approval. School districts were asked to indicate how prepared their SMTs were for this process. As can be seen from the pie chart in Figure 5.1, in 60% of the districts the school management teams were reported to be definitely not prepared, and only in 15% of the districts were the SMTs prepared to make decisions regarding their school budgets. In twenty-five percent or 5 districts, the teams were viewed as being somewhat prepared for making budgetary decisions. These results when placed within the context of training provided to the teams are not surprising. For example, only 42% of the districts stated that the SMTs had received training in zero-based budgeting.

Figure 5.1

School Management Teams: Perceived Level of Training for Budget Decision-Making



The issue of adequacy of training for the teams looms large in the study, especially when the data in Table 5.3 is examined. The Table reflects insufficient training for the school management teams in areas that are critical to their functioning. In the two areas deemed critical to a team's ability to function as a viable and cohesive decision-making body- consensus building and

Table 5.3

Level of Training Received by School Management Teams With Respect to Team Functioning and Abbott Requirements

	Level of Training			
Critical Areas	None	Very Little	Some	Great Deal
Team Functioning				
Decision Making	4.8%	19.0%	52.4%	23.8%
Consensus Building	4.8%	4.8%	66.7%	23.8%
Abbott				
a) Abbott regulations	4.8%	14.3%	38.1%	42.9%
b) Student needs assessment	4.8%	23.8%	61.9%	9.5%
c) Program needs assessment	4.8%	14.3%	38.1%	42.9%

Note: Number of districts responding: 21

decision-making effectiveness- only five districts or 23.8%, reported that their SMTs were provided with significant or substantial training. SMTs in most districts received only some training in both areas, and 1 district reported that its SMTs was given no training support in either area. On the other hand, one sees from the data furnished in the Table that proportionately more districts engaged their teams in training around the Abbott regulations and program needs assessments. For example, 43% of the districts indicated that their SMTs received substantial training in both understanding the Abbott regulations and program needs assessment. One may surmise that both these topics were logical starting point for the SMTs given the early decisions that schools had to make around models for adoption. One would expect however that as districts become more involved in implementation, and as the SMTs engage in making other decisions and choices for their buildings that the level of training will increase appreciably.

Resource Constraints and Problems Experienced During the First Six Months into the Reform

There was an interest in the study to understand the constraints and problems encountered by the districts in their attempts to conform to the requirements of Abbott. We discussed earlier in Section 1 of this report how policy is affected by the variability at the local level and how such variability is related to resource, organizational, political and cultural differences. We further argued that policy implementation is susceptible to the impact of these variables. Hence, rather than having a unitary pattern of response to a mandated reform one could have varied responses among districts that are presumed to be similar. We take this notion of local variability up in this section by identifying the different issues surfaced by the districts during the first six months of implementation. The results are presented as three distinct sets of findings. First, we present data on the resource constraints that districts identified and the inter-relationship that exists among these constraints. Second, we examine the key issues districts grappled with during the start-up phases of implementation. Third we try to establish the degree of inter-connectedness among the issues.

Resource Issues

A necessary precondition for the implementation of any program is the availability of a key set of resources. These resources include, but are not limited to time, knowledge, finance, personnel and information. Districts were asked to indicate the extent to which each of these posed a barrier to their implementation efforts. Their responses are captured by the data in Table 5.4. The data indicates that the element of time was the most severe resource constraint that districts had to grapple with during the early stages of implementation. Seventy-six percent of the districts noted that time was a constraining factor as they sought to comply with the State directives. Both personnel and financial issues were cited by at least half of the districts as other major obstacles during the first year of implementation. Districts experienced difficulties in finding

Table 5.4

Level of Severity of Resource Constraints Experienced by Abbott Districts During the First Year of Implementation

	Level of Severity		
Resource Constraint	Low	Moderate	High
Time	14.3%	9.5%	76.2%
Knowledge	23.8%	38.1%	38.1%
Finance	9.1%	27.3%	54.5%
Personnel	14.3%	28.6%	57.1%
Information	14.3%	38.1%	47.6%

Number of districts: 21

*** One district's response fell outside the categories provided.**

personnel to co-ordinate the reform process and had to use existing staff who already had other major responsibilities for other key areas of their school operations. Several districts complained about how overwhelming the process was. In contrast to these resource issues, districts were less inclined to feel that knowledge was a major obstacle, although the information which they received was viewed as being slightly more problematic.

A series of zero order correlation were calculated in order to explore more fully the degree to which these resource constraints were related to each other (See Table 5.5). The correlations indicate that information was the one resource that was consistently related to all of the other resource problems experienced. The magnitude of the relationships were .62 (with time); .86 (with knowledge); .55 (with finance); and .73 (with personnel). The nature of the relationships between this variable and the others implies that the problems which the districts experienced with information received from the NJDOE had an adverse and ripple effect on other organizational issues. The more difficulty districts perceived with the information they were getting from the NJDOE the more likely they were to indicate experiencing problems in other areas. Personnel issues were also significantly related to knowledge and finance which suggested that 1) problems with personnel and problems with knowledge about the reform were related, and 2) that personnel issues were also bound up with financial problems.

Table 5.5

Relationship Between Resource Constraints (Inter-Correlations)

	Knowledge	Finance	Personnel	Information
Time	.52**	.23	.40	.62**
Knowledge		.36	.65**	.86**
Finance			.71**	.55*
Personnel				.73**

**p<.01, *p<.02

The compounding effect of the problems associated with the quality and clarity of the information which the districts received during the start up phase of the reform cannot be overstated. Indeed, when we reexamined the relationship between the various resource issues, controlling for information problems, the original relationships changed dramatically. In all instances the correlations were significantly reduced. These findings suggest that many of the perceived related resource problems were in fact influenced by the communication difficulties between the DOE and the districts. The comments provided by the districts alluded to the fact that the information received from the state was confusing and inconsistent. In speaking to the inconsistency of information received from the state and its subsequent impact on knowing what to do, one district observed that their 'knowledge is only as good as the rules in effect on any given day'.

Implementation Difficulties Experienced During First Six Months

In trying to get a more definitive understanding of the concrete problems that they faced during the early start-up phase of the reform, districts were asked to identify with more specificity the problems they experienced during the first six months into the reform. Their responses are presented in Table 5.6. As can be seen from the Table, the most serious problems were a) lack of clarity from the DOE; b) lack of time to plan effectively; c) insufficient funding, and d) problems in linking or co-ordinating aspects of the reform with other organizational needs. In all instances, over 70% of the districts indicated that these problems posed great challenges to them and their schools in their implementation efforts.

Table 5.6

Problems and their Perceived Difficulty During the First Six Months of Implementation

	Degree of Difficulty		
Problem	Little to None	Some	Great
Lack of clarity from State Department of Education	--	19.0%	81.0%
Lack of understanding on how to implement certain elements of the reform	--	33.3%	66.7%
Lack of time to plan effectively	4.8%	19.0%	76.2%
Insufficient funding*	4.8%	14.3%	71.4%
Lack of facilities	--	31.6%	68.5%
Problems in linking or coordinating aspects of the reform with other organizational needs	9.5%	19.0%	71.4%
Lack of support or resistance from groups within district	55.0%	20.0%	25.0%

District responding: 22

*One district provided a response that did not fall in any of the categories provided.

Two-thirds of the districts also revealed that facility issues and not understanding how to implement certain elements of the reform created serious difficulties during the early stages of implementation. Table 5.7 shows the interconnectedness between the problems which districts experienced during the first six months of implementation. The data reveals that the perceived lack of clarity from the state significantly impacted on understanding what to do, on organizational issues and funding problems. Funding problems were also related to perceived difficulties with understanding how to proceed with implementation, organizational needs, and the time factor.

Table 5.7

Association Between Problems Experienced During
The First Six Months Of Implementation

	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7
X1 Lack of clarity from State	1.00	.80**	.56*	-.02	.22	.22	.64**
X2 Lack of understanding regarding implementation		1.00	.58*	.07	.25	.17	.55*
X3 Problems in linking reform to organizational needs			1.00	.22	.36	.05	.67**
X4 Lack of internal support				1.00	.35	.35	.16
X5 Lack of time to plan					1.00	.37	.55*
X6 Lack of facilities						1.00	.22
X7 Lack of funds							1.00

**p <.01

*p <.05

Conclusions

Districts and their schools confronted several capacity and resource issues as they started their implementation of whole school reform. Perhaps the most salient were the issues of time, information flow and funding. With respect to time, the reported findings underscored the fact that districts and schools had very little time to engage in quality planning or other meaningful capacity building efforts. Further, several of the resource problems shared a significant relationship with the problems which districts experienced in the flow and quality of information received from the NJDOE. Thus the quality, timeliness and accuracy of information were mitigating factors in the ability of districts and schools to successfully begin the process of change. As stated earlier, organizational strain emerged during the first year of implementation. Districts reported that they experienced difficulties in coordinating aspects of the Abbott reforms with other organizational needs. Finally, funding continued to be a major source of problem plaguing the district's reform efforts.

Much of what we have learnt from the districts in the study tend to support the literature concerning implementation, diffusion and innovation. In a climate where schools are becoming increasingly accountable to external agents to improve their outcomes, the present findings should inform the practice of those responsible for the facilitation of the implementation of the Abbott decision. There is ample evidence that successful implementation can occur when appropriate attention is paid to context and perception. Particularly as the NJDOE continues to decentralize the reform to local schools who often lack internal expertise and capacity, implementation will continue to be problematic unless these inadequacies are addressed.

Section VI

The New Jersey Department of Education's Role In the School Reform Process

Introduction

The New Jersey Department of Education has tended to operate in a strong regulatory policy environment. However, complex reform initiatives call for a rethinking and redefinition of the operating environments in not only local school districts but in state departments of education as well. In this new environment, states have to create climates in which consensus and a spirit of partnership between the local districts and themselves is fostered. We have seen in earlier sections of this report that there are dissonant viewpoints between the local districts and the New Jersey State Department of Education over critical areas of reform. We have also seen where organizational constraints and resource issues have imposed undue burden on the districts in their implementation efforts. In the context of these difficulties, what role, if any, has the State Department of Education played in alleviating some of these problems? It should be stated parenthetically at this point that the stringent deadlines imposed by the Courts, and the strong regulatory predisposition of the Department both have the potential to create a relationship that is likely to be fraught with difficulties. This is likely to be the case, particularly if the Department has not begun to redefine what its operating environment ought to be with respect to this reform.

Several studies have examined the role of state departments of education in complex reform initiatives including the role of the New Jersey State Department of Education in ensuring school districts compliance with the Quality Education Act (an act that was subsequently deemed to be unconstitutional by the courts). In the New Jersey study, the SDE was found to be, in spite of its difficulties, a positive force in assisting some districts overcome the hurdles and problems they confronted as they sought to comply with the regulations (Firestone et. al., 1997). However, the regulatory presence of the State was much more pronounced in the Special Needs Districts than it was in the more affluent districts. While there is unanimity among most students in their understanding of the State Department of Education (SDE) roles in reform that State departments of education must assume a policy and regulatory posture that ensures that districts adhere to policies and regulations that guarantee students success, the extent of the regulatory presence which is required to attain these ends is less definitively clear.

Lusi 's (1997) examination of the roles played by the Kentucky and Vermont state departments of education in their states' reforms arrived at a critical distinction between States holding districts accountable for process versus outcomes. Holding districts accountable for outcomes allows them to have much more latitude and flexibility in making their own decisions about processes. On the other hand, when States build their accountability on the platform of processes, their oversight presence in districts tends to become more pronounced. The Abbott rulings which place a strong emphasis on processes de facto implies that the State has to assume a fairly visible role. However, the rulings in their implications do consistently address district autonomy and flexibility to develop programs based on their demonstrated needs. These rulings do not inherently preclude the possibility of both groups SDE and local districts from creating a consensual operating environment that can aid the reform process.

Against this backdrop, districts were asked to evaluate the role of the State Department of Education and the School Review and Improvement teams in assisting them in their implementation efforts. Three lines of inquiry were pursued: 1) timeliness with which districts are notified about submissions to the State and provided with feedback; 2) clarity of the State's requests; and 3) the state's role in assisting with the reform. All three lines of inquiry converge on explicating the nature of communication and the quality of the relationship that currently exists between the State and the districts.

Findings

Timeliness of Requests, Clarity and Feedback

In their responses to the question on how far in advance does the state notify them of documents or items required for submission, half of the districts reported that requests from the state for items that need to be submitted are usually made less than two weeks in advance. Five percent or one district stated that the request is usually made between two to three weeks in advance of the due date, and approximately 27% or 6 districts indicated that requests were made a month or more in advance of the due date. Four districts noted that the timeliness with which the state notified them of items for submission depended on what information was being requested (See Table 6.1). Given the relatively short time span in which districts were expected to comply with state requests, the lack of clarity in the state's formulations of its requests became a compounding problem. For example, none of the districts felt that it was very easy or even easy to know what they needed to do in order to comply with the state's request. In fact, 59% stated that it was very difficult, 36.5% difficult and 4.5% somewhat easy (See Table 6.2).

Table 6.1

Timeliness of NJDOE Requests to Districts for Information

Timeliness of State Requests	Number of Districts Responding	Percent
More than a month in advance	4	18.2
A month in advance	2	9.1
Between 2-3 weeks in advance	1	4.5
Less than 2 weeks in advance	11	50.0
Other	4	18.2

N = 22

Table 6.2

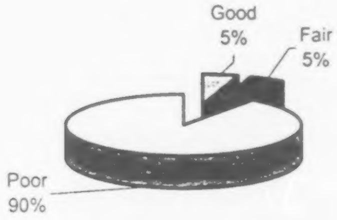
Districts' Perceptions on Ease of Knowing What is Required for Submission

Ease of Knowing Submission Requirements	Number of Districts Responding	Percent
Very Easy	0	0
Easy	0	0
Somewhat Easy	1	4.5
Difficult	8	36.4
Very Difficult	13	59.1

N = 22

Once submitted, the timeliness with which the State provided feedback to the Districts was unanimously rated as being extremely poor. Ninety percent of the Districts indicated that the State Department of Education was poor in the timeliness with which it provided them with feedback, 4.8% fair and 4.8% excellent. (See Figure 6.1) Two-thirds of the districts also noted that it was quite difficult for them to obtain a response from the department when they sought to get clarification or additional information on an issue (See Table 6.3). The untimely manner in which the state responded to the districts is vividly illustrated by the events surrounding the Districts' preschool plans.

Figure 6.1
Timeliness of State Feedback



According to an affidavit prepared by the Education Law Center, districts submitted their preschool plans to the State Department of Education in November of 1998. The Department did not issue its decisions on the plans until February 11, 1999, three months after their submission and about two weeks before the Districts had to submit their budgets to the department. Because of the lateness of the States' response, not only was an extension on the due date of the budgets had to be given, but districts were left with minimal time even with the extension in which to come up with alternative strategies (Ponessa, 1999). In the most recent court proceedings around the failure of the state department of education to provide for the quality preschool programs ordered by the courts, the Department was criticized by the state supreme justices for the untimely manner in which it responded to the districts' plans (New York Times, October 14, 999).

Table 6.3

Ease of Obtaining Clarification From the NJDOE

Ease of Obtaining Clarification	Number of Districts Responding	Percent
Very Easy	1	4.5
Easy	1	4.5
Somewhat Easy	4	18.2
Difficult	6	27.3
Very Difficult	9	40.9
Other	1	4.5

N = 22

Perception of Support Provided by State Department of Education

As indicated in the previous chapter, Districts are experiencing varying problems in their efforts to implement several aspects of the reform. The extent to which the State

Department of Education through its communications with the Districts has been able to play a supportive and helpful role in this process is depicted in the information contained in Tables 6.4 and 6.5. The data indicates that for most of the Districts, the perception of the State as a bastion of support and help is very negative. Fifty percent of the twenty-two districts responding to the survey stated that the State directions and guidelines for implementation were definitely not helpful, 22.7% felt they were not helpful, 22.7% somewhat helpful and 4.5% helpful. Thus, over 70% of the districts felt that communications from the State Department of Education proved to be of no help to them as they begun to comply with the court's orders. Indeed, one may surmise, given the districts' responses that the state's communications and directives rather than helping the reform actually stymied the reform process.

Table 6.4

Districts' Ratings of Helpfulness of NJDOE Communications and Directives

Rating	Number of Districts Responding	Percent
Very Helpful	0	0
Helpful	1	4.5
Somewhat Helpful	5	22.7
Not Helpful	5	22.7
Definitely Not Helpful	11	50.0

N = 22

Not surprisingly, given these findings districts were very negative in their ratings of the overall support provided to them by the state department of education. When asked to judge the quality of support received from the State, three districts indicated that they had received no support at the time of the survey, 8 districts or 38% of the districts rated the support as definitely inadequate, another 8 or 38% as inadequate, 1 district as adequate, and 1 as very adequate (See Table 6.5). The following comments proffered by the Districts capture the feelings of cynicism and frustrations felt by the districts in response to how the State has handled the process so far.

- The reform issues in Abbott are meant to fail in our urban districts so that the State DOE can once again claim that it's district's problem. (Abbott District 1)

- The NJDOE is learning about urban schools as they bump into problems, react and adjust. The districts are paying the price through the loss in initiative, effort and enthusiasm associated with compliance (Abbott District 2).

Table 6.5

Districts' Evaluation of Support Provided by NJDOE

Evaluation of Support	Number of Districts Responding	Percent
Very Adequate	1	4.8
Adequate	1	4.8
Inadequate	8	38.1
Definitely Inadequate	8	38.1
Has not received support	3	14.3

Note: Number of districts responding -21

- The initiatives are commitments on paper for which there are limited latitudes for customization to District variation. We are forced to adopt measures we do not feel we need (Abbott District 3).

- Give us the responsibility, the resources and hold us accountable as a district. Stop the time-consuming audits, meaningless plans, impossible timelines and political interference by the Department of Education (Abbott District 4).

Many districts in their open-ended comments articulated a need to have a state department of education that was collaborative in orientation, honest in its relationships with them, and sensitive to their needs. One district called for the state department to "run Abbott districts not from Trenton, but by a closer or tighter organization in which the 'players' have in-depth knowledge of the districts they are involved with".

School Review and Improvement Teams

One layer of support that has been established to assist the schools in their implementation efforts is the School Review and Improvement Team (SRI). This team is comprised of state department of education staff, and each Abbott school has been or will be assigned a team. The SRI Teams primary function is to work with the school management teams in their implementation of the Court directives. The teams are also expected to function as liaisons between the districts, developers and state department. They are also required to provide technical support to the schools in programmatic and fiscal areas. In the survey, the Abbott Districts were asked to provide information on the quality of support which the SRI teams have provided so far. That data is captured in (Table 6.6).

Table 6.6

Districts' Evaluation of Support Provided by the School Review and Improvement Teams

Evaluation of Support	Number of Districts Responding	Percent
Very Adequate	0	0
Adequate	3	15.8
Somewhat Adequate	7	38.1
Inadequate	1	5.3
Very Inadequate	8	42.1

Note: Number of Districts-19

At the time of this study, five districts had not had a visit from an SRI team, 5 districts had been visited less than once a month, six, once a month, and 5 between one to two weeks. The degree of satisfaction with the SRI teams varied among the districts. Of those districts that had been visited by a team, three found the assistance provided to be adequate, 7 somewhat adequate and 9 inadequate, to very inadequate.

In order to understand more clearly the type of assistance that the SRI teams have provided to the Districts, districts were asked to comment on the role the SRI teams have played so far. Districts who had rated the support of the teams as somewhat adequate or adequate indicated that the SRI teams had attended the school management meetings, helped them in their revision of their school budgets, assisted them in their decision making process in terms of whole school models, and had provided clarification on state department directives. A few districts expressed sympathies for their SRI teams noting that they had very little authority, or were still very unclear as to their roles and responsibilities. A larger number of districts were critical of the roles being played by their teams. One district noted that apart from attending school management team meetings the SRI team has done very little else in the district. A second district indicated that poor attendance by SRI team members hampered that team's ability to provide meaningful assistance. Two districts raised concerns about the quality of the team members as can be gleaned from the following comments:

- Unfortunately, some of the SRIs are still playing the role of former County monitors or educational specialists. The SRIs without former DOE experiences are too confused to help the SMTs.
- They come in and out, raise questions, never have answers to anything, and follow-up with a constant stream of faxes about non-consequential issues.

Conclusion

The state department of education's performance in the implementation of the Abbott reforms has been judged by the districts to be poor. Published articles in the New Jersey Star Ledger underscore the fractious relationship which has developed between the

Department and the Abbott Districts (New Jersey Star ledger, September October 15, 1999: 15). Yet, the state has a pivotal role to play in ensuring that the court ordered mandates are successfully implemented. That the state can maintain a regulatory presence and still fashion a collaborative working relationship with the Districts is possible. However in order to attain this, the state department has to clarify for itself how it intends to work with the school districts in a spirit of consensus and collaboration. The department has to realize that like all other state departments of education involved in complex endeavors of reform that it sets the tenor for the reform. If its implementation relationship with the districts is contentious and poor, then the extent to which the reforms will produce the intended outcomes envisioned by the courts becomes questionable.

Issues related to whether or not the department itself has the capacity to adequately support the districts in their implementation efforts must be addressed. Specifically, questions related to the level and quality of the resources that the department has to devote to this effort should be studied. It is clear from some of the steps which the Department has taken, for example, the creation of an early childhood department, that it is trying to build its internal capacity to be responsive to the districts. However, similar to the local districts, the department will have to vigorously engage in capacity building in order to ensure that it can play a viable supportive role in this ambitious effort. A more immediate task for the Department,. if it has not already done so, is to provide clarification on the roles, responsibilities and requisite qualifications for the SRI teams. It may also want to establish some mechanism that would allow it to evaluate the quality of support that the teams are providing. The data furnished in this study seems to indicate that there is unevenness among the teams with respect to their perceived effectiveness.

Section VII

Districts' Identification of Areas of Assistance Needed to Effectively Implement Abbott

Critical Factors Impeding Reform

The preceding sections of this report have highlighted some of the issues which the Abbott districts are currently facing as they seek to comply with the court-ordered mandates for change. In order to enlarge upon our understanding of the districts' perceptions of the concrete areas in which they would need assistance, we asked districts to first identify the three most critical factors that pose an obstacle to their goals for reform, whether they are satisfied that these factors are being redressed and the areas in which they would like to be provided with assistance. The following discussion encapsulates our findings.

Understandably for most districts the most serious obstacles to reform converge around the issues previously discussed in the section on implementation. As can be seen from Table 7.1, funding, lack of time to plan effectively and inadequate support from the department of education are perceived as being inimical to the goals of the reform. Thirteen districts (13) identified the lack of adequate funding as a major problem, eleven (11) the lack of time to plan effectively and seven (7) the lack of state support. Other potentially debilitating factors to the reform identified by the districts were facilities needs, not having in-district personnel to handle the demands of the reform, absence of community support, and a lack of willingness on the part of some district staff to change. We raised the question as to whether or not districts felt that these issues were being adequately addressed. Over 80% of the districts answered in the negative and only 20% felt satisfied that these problem areas were being attended to.

Table 7.1

Districts' Identification of the Most Serious Obstacles to Successful Implementation of Abbott Reform

Perceived Obstacle	Number of Districts Identifying as a major problem
Lack of funding	13
Lack of time to plan effectively	11
Lack of state support	7
Lack of facilities	5
Lack of in- district personnel to handle the demands of the reform	3
Lack of willingness by district staff to change	3
Lack of general support from community	2

What factors contributed to Districts' extreme sense of pessimism that current problems are not being adequately addressed? The two critical factors cited by districts were not enough time to deal with these issues and the absence of support from the NJDOE. It therefore seems that districts are caught in a vortical situation in which the very factors that are problematic are the ones that prevent them from dealing with issues that need to be redressed. Invariably when districts were asked to identify what help they would need to effectively implement whole school reform, their responses fell within one of the three following categories. First, more collegial assistance from the department of the education. Second, appropriate and sufficient funding and third, time to plan more effectively. Other responses provided by the districts include help with training for transitioning to decentralized structures, personnel at the central office to co-ordinate the reform, clear explanations, guidelines and models, and improved quality of service from the model developers.

Section VIII

Conclusion

Successful transformation of urban schools into systems in which issues of inequities are obliterated involves a process that is complex, engaging the commitment of federal, state community and school level actors. In districts such as the Abbott districts, where inequities are historically rooted and attempts at amelioration have been fraught with difficulties, the process of change can become extremely complicated. Yet the New Jersey State Supreme Court in its various rendered decisions has acknowledged the urgency of redressing these problems in order to fulfill the constitutional obligations which the state has to students in these systems. The reform agenda forwarded by the New Jersey Department of Education and endorsed by the Supreme Court represents a bold and significant step towards transforming the Abbott districts. However, evidence of past research has shown that such ambitious and far sweeping reforms are frequently hindered in their outcomes by various problems; which, if left unresolved, can result in the reforms failing to live up to expectations (Berman and McLaughlin, 1978; Mcluaghlin, 1991). Given the backdrop of the vast body of implementation research which has underscored these observations, the present study was motivated by an interest in understanding the issues districts faced in their attempts to institute the process of whole school reform in their schools. The study was deemed to be important for its potential contribution in identifying those pressing issues whose successful resolutions are imperative to these school systems transformation. In light of the preceding thought, the concluding comments presented below attempts to capture the difficulties plaguing the reform process and proffers recommendations for their resolution.

The Issue of Capacity

The concept of capacity within the context of implementation studies is often nebulous with varying interpretations as to its meaning. However, in this study, capacity was examined from two related vantage points. First, from the perspective of the ability of the Abbott Districts to build effective alliances involving a diverse base of constituencies to forward the

Abbott reform agenda. Second, from the perspective of the internal capabilities of the districts to successfully meet the challenges of the reform. Thus, capacity was taken to imply not only the existence of a set of internal capabilities but also the existence of a broader arrangement of external linkages that could be used to support the reform. Irrespective of which dimension of capacity we examined, it was patently clear that districts confront several capacity issues that are making it extremely difficult for them to carry out this reform. First, with respect to the issue of civic capacity, that is the degree to which districts enjoy broad base support from their community around Abbott, our findings indicate that while the districts themselves are in philosophical agreement with the spirit and intent of the Abbott reform, some districts find themselves with very little external support.

Many key community groups, such as the business community, private foundations, city government and institutions of higher education have maintained a marginal status with respect to the reform in several of the districts. However, in the poorest districts the problem is more severe. Without a prior history of civic involvement in education and without the organizational resources to engage in community building, these districts have received very little support from groups that would normally be considered part of an education coalition. Although the decentralized structures which the Abbott reform calls for opens up the governance process to community members, it is our contention that this process is not enough to ensure the flow of support which the Abbott districts need. This leads us to conclude that concerted attempts have to be made to systematically create coalitions that can bring to the Abbott districts expertise and resource strengths in crucial areas. Our stance on this point is supported by the research evidence cited in the discussion in Section IV of the report. To recapitulate, the research we allude to showed how the establishment of broad base community support figured prominently in those urban school districts that have been successful in their change efforts. Therefore, if the reforms in the Abbott communities are to be successful, the link between community and school has to be strengthened.

The second dimension of capacity examined in the study addressed the internal capabilities of the districts. These capabilities were framed around issues related to the availability of key sets of resources and their impact during the early stages of implementation. Unequivocally, the absence of strategic resources such as time, funds, personnel, knowledge, and information was severe, as supported by the data furnished earlier in the report. Of the many resource issues that districts struggled with, the most salient was time. Districts felt that they had little time to effectively plan what they were doing. The rushed time table for complying with the state's directives left the districts with not only very little time to engage in quality planning but also no opportunity to do the kinds of organizational review implied by a reform agenda as encompassing as Abbott. Not surprisingly therefore districts spoke of the tension between the reforms and other organizational needs. For one, in their comments on the surveys districts indicated that individuals in the central office with responsibilities for major aspects of their districts' functioning had to devote considerable time to the Abbott reforms thus, creating some dislocation in the systems.

What ought to be borne in mind as we address the problems of organizational needs is the fact that although Abbott primarily focuses on school based change, the central office does have the responsibility for helping to co-ordinate the change process. Furthermore, the devolution of responsibility to the building level implies that the central office also has the added burden of assisting schools in developing the range of abilities to effectively assume the tasks which hitherto fell under its domains. Thus, the non-occurrence of any quality review of the Abbott central offices organizational capacities because of the issues we have mentioned represented a serious shortcoming during the first year. The literature is replete with references on the critical role of the central office in school based change and the responsibilities which it has for developing mechanisms that will allow for the smooth transfer of power from central to decentralized structures (CPRE, 1998).

Given the time constraints of complying with the various elements of the reform, districts were also unable to engage in other internal capacity building activities that are implied by this reform. The training of the School Management Teams is most illustrative of this point. As was mentioned previously in the study one of the first decisions that the SMTs had to make centered on their school budgets. Using the process of zero-based budgeting, the SMTs had the responsibility for developing a school- based budget. However when asked how prepared the SMTs were to do this most of the districts answered negatively. Many districts noted that their school management teams had received no training in the zero-based budgeting process. Given the level of unpreparedeness among the SMTs, districts noted that central office personnel had to get involve in a process that was primarily the purview of the teams. Neither were districts during the early stages of implementation able to engage in other kinds of training activities that one would consider to be germane to the school management teams' abilities to function effectively. The first year of implementation thus can be characterized as a period during which the districts' efforts were directed at meeting the demands of the reform in a context of constricted and underdeveloped capacity.

The Problem of Information Flow

Perhaps one of the more serious problems that the districts experienced during the early stages of this reform was associated with the communication miscues between themselves and the NJDOE. These problems with the NJDOE were manifested in several different ways. First, information received from the NJDOE was perceived to be unclear thus rendering understanding of what to do problematic. Second, attempts to obtain clarification from the NJDOE were mired with difficulties. Third and most importantly, the timeliness with which the NJDOE either requested information or provided feedback to districts on information submitted was questionable. Consequently, the reform unfolded in an atmosphere of uncertainty and with a pronounced gap between what was understood to be at the nub of the reform as judicially affirmed and the regulations and directives that were devolved by the NJDOE. The net effect of all this was felt in two distinct ways. First, as we stated in Section V, the perceived resource and organizational difficulties were greatly influenced by the information problem. Second, districts developed a lack of faith in the veracity and utility of the NJDOE communications with 73% of them indicating that the NDJOE communications were not helpful as they proceeded in their reform efforts.

In top down external reforms where local actors have minimal latitude in determining the parameters or elements of change the quality of information flow from the external progenitors is important to ensuring successful implementation. Complex school reforms involving multi-layers of actors inevitably give rise to communication problems. In these types of reform models different groups and individuals are likely to hold widely varying interpretations and perceptions as to the meaning of change. In light of this it becomes incumbent on those spearheading the reform to develop communication mechanisms that allow for not only the accurate and timely flow of information but for that flow to occur both ways. As Fullan (1991: 199) states "two-way communication about specific innovations that are being attempted is a requirement of success. To the extent that the information flow is accurate, the problems of implementation get identified. This means that each individual's personal perception and concerns- the core of change- get aired".

It would therefore seem in the wake of our preceding discussion that the NJDOE and the Abbott Districts will have to collaboratively develop mechanisms to allow for the effective flow of information between them. Further the NJDOE has to find ways of generating guidelines for implementation that are clear, unambiguous and which they do easily lend themselves to misinterpretations.

The Relationship Between the NJDOE and Abbott Districts

The relationship between the NJDOE and Abbott districts during the first year of implementation can best be described as fractious with districts expressing feelings of cynicism towards the department of education and pessimism about the reforms. Many of the issues that we have presented so far help to explain why such feelings existed among the Abbott communities. However, as we alluded to in a previous section, the NJDOE has historically tended to adopt a strong regulatory as opposed to collaborative posture towards the Abbott districts. It has been perceived as being directive exhibiting little sensitivity to the needs of these districts. This viewpoint was reechoed in the open-ended comments provided by the districts on the survey. Overall the districts perceived the NJDOE to be non-supportive of their change efforts. Further, the effectiveness of the School Review and Improvement Team that ostensibly is the NJDOE structure for providing technical support to the districts was not established by the data we obtained in the study. In fact, with the exception of a few, most districts were inclined to rate the teams as being ineffective for a variety of reasons.

Obviously, if the reform is to be successful the tenuous relationship between the NJDOE and the Abbott districts has to address. First, the NJDOE has to work towards fashioning a collaborative rather than directive relationship with the Abbott districts. The literature on the change process has consistently shown that successful change occurs only when all the parties operate in an environment of collaboration and mutual trust. Second, the complexities of the proposed reforms imply that the working relationship between the districts and the NJDOE cannot be reduced to the issuance of guidelines or simply the mere presence of SRI teams. The state has a role in helping districts to develop their capacities, to provide legitimacy to their concerns as well as viewpoints about the reform by engaging in mutually beneficial dialogue, and to work along with the districts to solve the various problems that arise during implementation. However, to accomplish this, the NJDOE has to work towards building its own internal capacity to handle its new role as mangers of urban school change. Although our data on the School Review and Improvement Teams is somewhat limited, there is a further need on the part of the NJDOE to address some of the concerns which the districts have raised in the study, to include the competence of some team members, their familiarity with urban educational issues and their understanding of what their roles are.

As we stated in our concluding comments to Section VI of the report, the NJDOE has to set the tenor of the reform by exhibiting the kinds of behaviors and attitudes, which it expects the districts and their schools to demonstrate. As Lusi (1997), points out one can speak of a pedagogy of policy making from the perspective that States ought to communicate and deliver their expectations to schools in a manner which is congruent with the reform. Thus the concept of school-based change through local and participatory decision making inherent in Abbott looses much of its meaning if the State Department of Education continues to act in a manner which is highly directive and overly regulatory (Lusi, 1997: 168). To argue the case for the NJDOE to be more collaborative with the Districts is not to suggest that the State ought to minimize its oversight role for this reform, but rather to imply that the NJDOE like other state departments can fulfill its statutory obligations in ways that are less fractious and more congruent with what we have learnt about how to make meaningful educational changes that are sustainable particulary within the context of urban education.

The Persistent Problem of Funding and Issues of Policy Discontinuities

We have grouped these two sub-themes together, as there was not enough data for us to provide a more extensive discussion on their implications. However, because of their importance to the districts' change efforts we felt it was important to address them both in our concluding comments.

Funding remains a persistent and seemingly intractable problem for the districts. The source of funding the various positions and programs in Abbott, has pitted the districts' position against that of the State. The districts have expressed philosophical opposition towards reallocating funds from existing programs to fund the Abbott remedies. Although, the court decision called for the NJDOE to ensure that adequate funds are available to support the reform it is unclear as to how this is happening. The districts in their responses to the survey indicate that funding remains one of the major obstacles plaguing their implementation effort. However, sufficient follow-up information was not available for us to explore this issue in more depth.

Districts saw some discontinuities in the reform process and the standard based elements of the state's testing and curricular frameworks as evidenced by the data in Section III of the study. Specifically districts saw little compatibility between some elements of the reforms and their own curricular and assessment responses to the State's Core Content Standards, which they had initiated prior to Abbott. These discontinuities seem almost inevitable when one is dealing with national models whose curricular and programmatic focus have been developed to have an appeal that is broader than the specific elements of any given state's curricular and assessment systems. However, one would expect that the model developers in their training and subsequent work with the Districts and the NJDOE would be moving towards fashioning a tighter articulation between their models and NJDOE policies in curriculum and assessment.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

NAME OF DISTRICT: ____________________

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Educational Administration and Supervision at Seton Hall University is conducting a longitudinal study designed to measure the impact of the Abbott Decision on changes in the twenty-eight Abbott districts. The study involves the collection of baseline data on several factors related to school change. We would like to know your district's experience with respect to these factors. The questionnaire is designed to be completed by the person(s) most knowledgeable about the implementation process in your district.

PART A: The following represents the specific remedies set forth by the Supreme Court in Abbott IV and V. The Court requires the State to provide adequate funding to implement each of these remedies. Please indicate the importance of each remedy to your overall goal of systemic improvement by placing a check in the appropriate space.

A1.	DISTRICT-WIDE AND FOR ALL SCHOOLS	VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT	DEFINITELY NOT IMPORTANT
1	Regular education funding at parity ($8,800 pp for 98-99)					
2	Classroom-based improved curriculum and instruction aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards					
3	Ongoing high quality professional development					
4	Special instructional staff as needed, e.g., elementary music, art, and science teachers					
5	Additional special education programs and services, if needed					
6	2 technology specialists in each school, one computer for each five students, and more if needed					
7	One security guard for every 500 elementary students and 225 secondary students, and more if needed					
8	Instructional-based after school and summer programs if needed					
9	Enhanced nutritional programs if needed					
10	Comprehensive facilities improvement including eliminating code violations and overcrowding, building new schools, assuring educational adequacy, and providing early childhood facilities					
11	Reallocation of existing funding permitted only if such re-assignment will not undermine or weaken existing effective regular education or supplemental programs					
12	Ongoing assessment of student academic, health, and social needs to determine the design and extent of programs required to wipe out disadvantages and to prepare adequate budgets and requests for additional funding					
13	Commissioner must defer to local authorities in all program and budgeting decisions since local professionals are in the best position to know the needs of their students					

A2.	***Please indicate the importance of each of the elementary remedies set forth by the Supreme Court Abbott IV and V.***	VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT	DEFINITELY NOT IMPORTANT
1	Full-day kindergarten					
2	Family support teams to provide health and social services and referrals including at least one social worker, counselor, nurse, parent liaison, and instructional facilitator					
3	On site health and social services if needed					
4	Collaboration with Success For All (SFA), depending upon 80% faculty by-in, and a full-time, school-based instructional facilitator					
5	An alternative model to SFA, if research results of such an alternative are as strong as or stronger than those of SFA					
6	School-based management and budgeting					
7	90 minutes of reading instruction for grades 1-3 each day in class sizes of 15					
8	Full-time parent liaison to assure parent education and participation					
9	Overall class size reduction to 21 in grades K-3, and 23 in grades 4-5					
10	High quality, intensive preschool for all 3's and 4's with health, social and transportation services which include class size of 15 with one certified teacher and one highly trained assistant teacher and curriculum aligned with whole school reform					
11	Extended preschool day and year					
A3.	***Please indicate the importance of each of the secondary school remedies set forth by the Supreme Court Abbott IV and V.***					
1	Community service coordinators to provide health and social service referrals					
2	On site health and social services if needed					
3	Dropout prevention coordinators					
4	Alternative middle and high schools or programs as needed					
5	School to work and college transition programs as needed					
6	Class size reduction to 23 in grades 5-8 and 24 in high school					

Part B: The following questions concern any reform initiatives begun in your District prior to the 1997 Abbott Decisions.

B1.	***From the list of possible reform initiatives below, please indicate which of these existed in your district before the 1997 Abbot Decision by placing a check (✓) mark under the column "implemented prior to Abbott". If an initiative was not implemented you may either place an (x) or leave blank this column***	IMPLEMENTED PRIOR TO ABBOTT
1	Early Childhood	
2	Standards Based Curriculum Reform	
3	Standards Based Assessment	
4	School Restructuring	
5	Professional Development	
6	Technology	
7	School-Based Management	
8	At-risk Programs	
9	Facilities	
10	Community Relationships	
11	Parental Involvement	
12	Other (Please Specify)	

		DEGREE OF COMPATIBILITY				
B2.	***Considering all the reforms which you have checked in B1 indicate how much compatibility exists between what's been in place in your district and the State directives.***	A GREAT DEAL	SOME	NOT TO MUCH	VERY LITTLE	NONE
1	Early Childhood					
2	Standards Based Curriculum Reform					
3	Standards Based Assessment					
4	School Restructuring					
5	Professional Development					
6	Technology					
7	School-Based Management					
8	At-risk Programs					
9	Facilities					
10	Community Relationships					
11	Parental Involvement					
12	Other (Please Specify)					

B3.	***How would you rate the support received from each of the following groups around local reform initiative in your district.***	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
1	Board members or their counterparts (i.e. advisory boards)				
2	Private Corporations				
3	Private Foundations				
4	City Government				
5	Community Based Organizations				
6	Citizenry (parents)				
7	Religious Organizations				
8	Institutions of Higher Education				
9	Teachers Union				
10	Advocacy Organizations				

Part C: Questions C1 through C8 pertain to the current status of your implementation.

C1.	***Please indicate the number of cohort 2 schools which have selected each of the following models.***	Number of Schools
1	Success for All	
2	Modern Red School House	
3	Comer	
4	Accelerated Learning	
5	Adaptive Learning/Community for Learning	

C2.	***Which of the following methods were used by schools in your district to select a model? (Check all that apply)***	
1	School vote with high teacher participation	
2	School vote with low teacher participation	
3	Principal decision	
4	Central Office decision	
5	Schools already had the model	

C3. Using the scale below, rate the quality of the training your district has received from the model developers.

	(1) very adequate (2) adequate (3) somewhat adequate (4) inadequate **(5) very inadequate (6) didn't receive training yet**	**Ratings** **1 2 3 4 5 6**
1	Success for All	
2	Modern Red School House	
3	Comer	
4	Accelerated Learning	
5	Adaptive Learning/Community for Learning	

			Exists in most schools	Exists in some schools	Exists in no schools	Process of establishing
C4.	***The Abbott Decision called for the establishment of several positions as part of the reform plan. For each of these positions, please indicate whether it has been established in most of your schools, in only some of your schools, in none of your schools, or is in the process of being established.***					
1	Instructional facilitator					
2	**Family Support Team**	a. social worker				
		b. nurse				
		c. counselor				
		d. parent liaison				
3	Technology coordinator					
4	Drop-out prevention coordinator					
5	Community facilitator					

C5.	***So far, has your district conducted a comprehensive needs assessment in each of the following areas***	*(✓)*
1	Early childhood education	
2	Social/health needs	
3	Facilities	

C6.	***On average, how prepared were the school management teams in developing the school budgets?***	*(✓)*
	Very prepared	
	Prepared	
	Somewhat prepared	
	Definitely not prepared	

C7. Was training provided to the SMTs in zero-based budgeting? Yes ____ No ____

If yes, Please describe the type of training

____

____

____

____

C8.	***What changes has your district made in the placement of special education students?***	*(✓)*
1	No changes	
2	Moved students back to neighborhood school building but kept them in special education classrooms	
3	Made an effort to include students in the regular classroom	
4	Made an effort to include students in the regular classroom with additional support	

C9. How much training has your School Management Team received in the following areas?		**DEGREE OF COMPATIBILITY**				
		A GREAT DEAL	**SOME**	**NOT TO MUCH**	**VERY LITTLE**	**NONE**
1	Decision making					
2	Consensus building					
3	Student needs assessment					
4	Program needs assessment					
5	Abbott regulations					

PART D: The next group of questions concern the role of the New Jersey State Department of Education and the School Review and Implementation Teams in assisting your planning and implementation efforts. D1 through D6 concern the State Department of Education in general, D7 through D10 ask specific questions about the School Review and Improvement Teams.

D1. How far in advance do you generally know what information is needed for submission to the state?		***(✓)***
1	More than a month in advance	
2	A month in advance	
3	Between two-three weeks in advance	
4	Less than two weeks in advance	

D2. How easy is it for you to know from the State what correct steps are needed to comply with their requests?

1	Very easy	
2	Easy	
3	Somewhat easy	
4	Difficult	
5	Very difficult	

D3. How helpful have you found the directions from the State regarding implementation of the Abbott Decision?

	Very helpful	
	Helpful	
	Somewhat helpful	
	Not helpful	
	Definitely not helpful	

D4. How would you rate the support you have received so far from the State?

	Very adequate	
	Adequate	
	Inadequate	
	Definitely inadequate	
	Have received no support	

D5. If you need clarification or additional information on an issue, how easy is it for you to receive a response from the State?

	Very easy	

	Easy	
	Somewhat easy	
	Quite difficult	
	very difficult	

D6. How would you rate the timeliness with which the State provides you with feedback on documents or plans you have submitted for their approval or review?

	Excellent	
	Good	
	Fair	
	Poor	

D7. What role does the School Review and Improvement Team play in your district?

____

____

____

____

D8. How many members are on the School Review and Improvement Team in your district? ______

	D9. How frequently does the Team visit your district?	(✓)
	Daily	
	Weekly	
	Every two weeks	
	Once a month	
	Less than once a month	
	Haven't had a visit yet	

D10. In general, how would you rate the assistance provided by the School Review and Improvement Team?

	Very adequate	
	Adequate	
	Somewhat adequate	
	Inadequate	
	Very inadequate	

PART E: District Capacity: The following questions pertain to the existence of various factors likely to impact on your implementation.

	EA1. It has been stated that the successful implementation of any new program is contingent upon the availability of various resources. For each of the following resources, please indicate the extent to which each poses a problem for your district in its implementation efforts.	A Definitely a Problem	B Somewhat a problem	C Not a Problem
1	Time			
2	Knowledge			
3	Finance			
4	Personnel			
5	Information			

E1B. Please explain any resource that received a check in either box A or B.

	E2. During the past six months, to what extent has your district experienced each of the following difficulties in complying with the Abbott decision?	5 Great difficulty	4 Much difficulty	3 Some difficulty	2 Little difficulty	1 No difficulty
1	Lack of clarity from State					
2	Lack of understanding on how to implement certain elements of the reform.					
3	Problems in linking or co-ordinating aspects of the reform with other organizational needs.					
4	Lack of support or resistance from groups within your district.					
5	Lack of time to plan effectively.					
6	Insufficient funding					
7	Lack of facilities					

	E3. How much knowledge do you believe each of the following groups in your community has about the Abbott decision?	3 A lot	2 Some	1 Very Little
1	Board members or their counterparts (i.e. advisory boards)			
2	Private Corporations			
3	Private Foundations			
4	City Government			
5	Community Based Organizations			
6	Citizenry (parents)			
7	Religious Organizations			
8	Institutions of Higher Education			
9	Teachers Union			
10	Advocacy Organizations			

	E4. So far, how much support have you received from each of the following groups in implementing the Abbott Decision?	A great deal	Some support	Very little support
1	Board members or their counterparts (i.e. advisory boards)			
2	Private Corporations			
3	Private Foundations			
4	City Government			
5	Community Based Organizations			
6	Citizenry (parents)			
7	Religious Organizations			
8	Institutions of Higher Education			
9	Teachers Union			
10	Advocacy Organizations			

PART F: The following questions deal with your own assessment of the factors that impact on your District's success.

F1. Thinking about your district and the goals which you have established for it, in your opinion what are the three major factors impacting on your district's ability to successfully meet these goals?

F2. Do you feel that the reform initiatives in the Abbott decisions adequately address these factors? Yes____ No ____

If no, please explain.

F3. What help if any, do you feel your district would need in order to effectively implement whole school reform?

Thank You For Your Cooperation